

NM: This is the third tape we're doing in this theology speculation.

JML: Correct. On August 17. I want to begin by talking about saints.

NM: Saints.

JML: In most religions, saints play a tremendous role. They intercede for lesser humans, they give witness to God's greatness, they are models for humanity by their ability to withstand suffering, some of the suffering self-imposed. Do you see saints in the same way as in the traditional religions?

NM: You reach me on my weak point. I really don't know I have much to say on the subject. Let me see what I can scrape together.

It makes sense to me that there would be many people that God would feel close to. In other words, I don't think God feels equally close to all of us. In fact, I would doubt that very much. To begin with, given my notions of the devil obfuscating the divine venture, doing his or her best, the devil, that is, to stop God, whether male or female in gender or both, the devil doing the best to stop God, most human beings are a complex mixture of good and evil, they're devil-infested, they're God-illuminated, we're both at the same time and so it's very hard to reach them. What characterizes humanity today is that very few of us ever get a

message from God or the devil directly. We live in a certain—
technology adds its smudge to our senses and we live in a complex
and contradictory environment—sensually speaking, theologically
speaking, spiritually speaking, however you want to phrase it,
we're not as near to ultimates as we were a few years ago. That's
my first thought.

Now there are people who succeed, one way or another, of
divesting themselves of most of the devil. It's very hard for me to
believe that a saint exists without any of the devil in him or her. I
think saints are relatively pure. The notion that they're absolutely
pure—well, I find, given my temperament, I find that almost
offensive because it begs too many questions. It makes everything

too easy and it opens up too many questions on the other side of it.

Because if a saint is perfect, why the hell do they fail so often?

You see, and do they fail because the devil overtakes them or—it's

very interesting but essentially medieval arguments. Like maybe a

saint is so good that the devil has to use extraordinary efforts to

defeat this saint, and so serves God's purpose and the saint is

happy too.

JML: But all saints are not defeated.

NM: No. But—give me an example of some triumphant saints.

JML: Saint Peter

NM: Saint Peter was a mess! He deserted Christ three times.

JML: But then he redeemed himself and started Christianity.

NM: Yes, I know, but Christianity may still be laboring under the fact that it was Peter who commenced it. You've got a three-time treacherous no-good man there. . .

JML: There are other saints. . .

NM: I won't say that people can't repent, and they can't restore their relation to something finer than themselves, but nonetheless they remain under suspicion.

JML: That, in a way, brings me beautifully to my next question.

Because your god and your devil are limited, I assume—

NM: Not limited but relatively finite. Not infinite.

JML: I assume that human perfection is truly impossible for you, as you just said. If there were a human being who was all-good, she or he would be better than God. And if we found an absolutely perfect human being, your theology would be hard-pressed to account for that person.

NM: I don't think I'm in any danger of having my theology, such as it is, overthrown by that premise. Of course, there'll never be a perfect human being. It's out of the range of our thinking. I'm going so far as to say there's no such thing as a perfect divinity.

The nature of the universe is provisional.

JML: Ergo, there can never be a perfect human being.

NM: Well, that just comes out of it. Apart from that, we don't need the reasoning to justify the remark that there's no such thing as a perfect human being. Everything in our experience tells us—that wonderful comic line by Jack Okie, that nobody's perfect but—

JML: You wanted to know if a saint is perfect. I admit, Saint Peter was not perfect. But think of someone like St. Francis of Assisi. . .

NM: I thought of him as we were mentioning this and yes, he's perfect in a beautiful, perfect way that took care of a great many animals, and thereby brought us a little more into sympathy with our friends, the animals, but I don't know that he affected human

nature that much to the good. I'm talking about the kind of saints

who were trying to change human nature that much to the good.

He didn't do that much. I'm talking about the kind of saints who

are trying to change human nature, strive valiantly to change

human nature and almost always end up as martyrs. The way they

become saints is first they were martyrs.

JML: The one way we know a saint is a saint, at least in

Christianity, is they were martyred. St. Steven was martyred, St.

Sebastian was martyred. . .

You mentioned the animals there. To shift for a moment:

how far does the chain of being—how far down the chain of being

does the war between god and the devil manifest itself?

NM: I have no idea.

JML: You said that dogs have souls.

NM: Yes.

JML: Then I assume both sides have enlisted them. What about the other animals? Are some on God's side? Are the eagles and the doves—some on God's side? The vultures and the snakes. . .?

NM: It's possible. Obviously, for me to speak with anything suggesting authority on these matters is comic. I rely almost always on the sort of verdicts that humans come up with after centuries of dealing with certain problems. For instance, I would never dismiss it out of hand. After all, my belief in God and devil comes to some extent from the fact that the majority of people,

through all of recorded time, believe in both evil spirits and good spirits and finally, in a god and a devil—with angels and demons.

And I feel that if the majority believe that, one has to pay a certain attention to that. One can't ignore it.

So by that token, dogs tend to be closer to God, perhaps, in that they have loyalty, they have affection, they have the need to love, whereas cats might strike me very often as being creatures of the devil. Now, mind you, this is all—they were all created by God. It's just that the devil may have preempted some of those creations earlier than others.

JML: Snakes and crocodiles and . . .

NM: Well, there it's totally beyond me. I'm an ignorant man when it comes to those animals. If I knew more about their positive functions, I could talk about, but I'm relatively—I confess to abysmal ignorance on what the positive functions are of snakes, toads, rats, cockroaches, lice. . . I don't pretend to be able to talk about that.

JML: Are there parts of existence in your view that are unclaimed by either side? I'm thinking of, oh, microbes, uninhabited planets, the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, sort of neutral territory that God and the devil have not contested or not used. Or is everything polarized?

NM: No, I think it's—I'd say it's—I'll use an odd word. I'd say it's more a matter of divine investment. In other words, I keep going back to the notion that God is not all-powerful but the Creator. So in the course of creating, certain elements of creation are advanced. Certain elements are more interesting to God. Certain elements are pursued. Others are seen as interesting possibilities for the future. And very often, can live relatively unchanged for millennia, for aeons. So when we come to such matters as bacteria, where I'm immensely ignorant and can't pretend not to be, it's possible that these are almost passive experiments by God. Or it may be the devil dipping his toe into the water when you have some particularly evil bacteria. On the other hand, I don't

have, I don't subscribe to the modern notion that all disease is evil, is awful, is to be eradicated at all cost, and we should all live 300 years as part of our life situation. I think life and death, as you know from what I said before, have this intimate relation to each other in the sense that death is as great a test and as great an adventure as life. And that no more could we conceive of an existence where there was only daylight and never night, so I can't conceive of life without death and rebirth. I think we all go back in again through the mix and come out, and go in and come out, and so when we start talking about karma, I don't have the remotest clue what we become in our next existence. It's possible, it's perfectly possible, that some or all of us have to descend to the

bacteriological level and come back from there. I don't My guess is its not that complicated—it makes for a very complex universe.

But what I would say is I think there's a purpose for everything, including the agents that tend to infect us and mutilate us and kill us. It may be there are agents of death God experiments with fully as much as God experiments with new kinds of life and with the development of human life. Human life being the masterwork.

JML: Death and life being related. . .

NM: Not interrelated. . .

JML: Intertwined. . .

NM: Actually—not identical but part of the same existence.

JML: Yang and yin. Interpenetrating.

NM: OK.

JML: You've talked a lot about the moment of death and the state of mind one is in at the moment of death—this follows, I think from what you just said. Peace of mind, I think, is important to many religions—peace of mind at death, none moreso than Catholicism. Which actually has a sacrament called Extreme Unction [Mike, now called "Sacrament of the Sick" or some such] which was created by the Church to give to people at the moment of death.

NM: Let me get this straight—what were the origins? How did the Church arrive at this power?

JML: Well, the Church over the history of a millennia, created seven sacraments. And the last one that was created was expressly created—I can't tell you who came up with the theology of it, which Father of the Church—it was a sense of the Church reaching out to the individual at the moment of death and applying all of its powers to giving that person peace of mind as they passed over. . .

NM: Giving them a belief in peace of mind. . .

JML: Yes, giving them the belief that—in the Church's point of view, Extreme Unction works—and I've seen people receive it—and you know, it gives them tremendous peace of mind.

NM: I believe that it's effective. Certainly for devout Catholics, it would be effective. Let me tell you a small story about a dear friend of mine, Eddie Bonetti, who was dying of cancer. And I spoke to him a day before he died. He was a marvelous fellow and you'll see from the conversation what his positive qualities were.

We were talking on the phone and he knew it was very close to the end. And at a given moment, I said to him, "Eddie, are you scared?" He said, "Yeah, Norman, I am scared a little."

I said, "Eddie, it seems to me you have less reason to be scared than anyone I know. Because you're the loyalest guy I've ever been in contact with. You've never turned your back on a

friend, no matter how much it cost you. I really can't believe that something bad is waiting for you."

He said, "You really believe that, Norman?"

I said, "I think so, I really do."

And the woman he was living with at the time told me he died happily shortly after the conversation. Which pleased me immensely because I loved the guy and if I was any use to him at all, and I am tempted, naturally, my words had something to do with his peace.

So, yes, I can believe in Extreme Unction as something that's wonderful for people when they receive. I will say it's a human creation, from what you tell me, there are no miracles, there was

no revelation from God. This was the human attempt, if you will, to understand how God's mind works. Now it was done with great backing, huge culture, much tradition, many decisions, committees arguing over it—which makes me dubious—coming up with their sacraments one by one, developing them, using them. I'm sure if I knew more theology, I could talk about the sacraments they used for a while then threw away because they weren't quite working. In any event, they ended with these seven sacraments, with the mystical number seven, which again for so many people all over the universe, all over our world believe, that seven is an incredible number. I believe it too. I believe it's easier to believe that there's something right about the number than that it's wrong.

So, all right, yes, I can believe Extreme Unction works for a devout Catholic. It might not work for someone like myself. If someone came in and said, "You're going to die in peace," I'd probably say, "Hey, cut it. Let me die. If you don't mind, I'll fine-tune my own end—you don't need to do it for me."

Certain theologians would say, "Well, this is vanity. This is precisely why you're not going to have a good end." And my feeling is, "Hey, pal, it's open. None of us know. It doesn't matter how much tradition is behind it. Tradition suggests there may well be something powerful behind it, but it doesn't prove it.

JML: Why is the state of mind at death so very important to you?

NM: Because I think it's our point of departure.

JML: So what? Everybody has a bad day. You could happen to have a bad day on the day you die.

NM: No, no—whenever you have a bad day, there's a lot of reasons for the bad day. I can give you 20 reasons for a bad day, some are serious, some are passing. But, no, I won't hide behind—that is, I won't let you hide behind the notion of a bad day.

JML: But there's also days we have false euphoria. We feel good for no accountable reason and then the next day, we say, "Why did I feel so good? I have all these problems!"

NM: There, I have my favorite notion. It is that it's karmic.

Whenever we have an emotion we can't account for, good or bad,

it's karmic. It's the only visitation we can have from previous

lives, which by the laws of the game, which are basic and

necessary, we can't know who we were and where we were in

previous lives. But something has happened that comes to us from

a previous life and says, "Hey, this wonderful thing—I'm thinking

about it, now you think about it too." Or in reverse: "There's

doom approaching, pal. Get ready for it."

Now in that sense, unaccountable emotions are almost
always karmic.

But I'm not answering your question. I want to try to answer it. I think at the moment we die, we are the result of all the good and bad we've done, and all the courage and cowardice we've exercised. In other words, it can be drawn as an arrow of any length and any intensity. And so, for example, if we die with a desire to be reborn, I think it means a great deal to God. If you will, it's almost like we reach into a little to select a pup, a pup that catches our eye that we choose to take home. Using that crude analogy, I think if we die—Eliot's wonderful line, "not with a bang but a whimper"—which obviously obsessed Eliot, because Eliot's writing was always based entirely on the idea of how would one meet one's death? If you approach his poetry with that in mind,

The Wasteland is a study of people who don't have a clue how to die. Along with everything else it is, but that's a large part of it.

So in that sense, I think it's terribly important what our attitude is because we can't fake it. We can fake a huge number of emotions to ourselves, certainly to others, to our friends, to our enemies—we spend three-quarters of our lives acting. One of the reasons—this is a cynical remark but I do enjoy it—one of the reasons people get married is so they can be themselves. To wit, they don't have to give a face to the world. People who live alone are always obliged to give a face to the world, they have to depend too much upon friends, etc., etc.

So, at that moment when one's close to death, when one knows one's going to die, there is an urge toward more life, or toward peace or—and this is the worst condition—toward stupor. In other words, "I don't want to feel pain, let me feel nothing." Not peace, but nothing. And these are choices.

And really, suppose you're looking at people and wondering who you'll refashion and there's one particular human being God is most interested in, but at the last moment that person is pleading for stupor. God says, "Do I really want to go through this again? This person was really a great disappointment to me."

You see, the notion I have is our judgment comes in the form of our rebirth. I think we spoke about this before. So in that case,

no need to repeat it. But I think the only judgment we get is how we're reborn. Or, very often, the decision is, "No. No need to be reborn. Off the board." True death. End of existence.

JML: Someone told me recently—

NM: Let me just finish—

JML: Sorry.

NM: What it comes down to, why the manner in which you meet your death is important, is if you have no desire to live again, that could be determinative.

JML: I love the metaphor of the litter. That's beautiful—a wonderful metaphor. Fabulous.

But I want to explore this a little more if I may. Several thoughts: One of them is that many people when they're dying—and a nurse told me this recently, a nurse who was a hospice nurse, who cared for the dying, three times a week she went through this, and she had great experience—she told me that the end, often, because people were taking drugs, they'd be on morphine to cut the pain, their personality, as she put it, "dissolves." That they were live, they were functioning, but their soul is already gone. And so, for them, the death was before they died—the body was still breathing, the automatic systems were working but—but indeed, the people I have seen die, they revert powerful impulses, powerful atavistic impulses. The desire to keep oneself clean—

they get on the toilet when they're dying. The desire to remember one's mother or grandmother. Or when someone touches you, the desire to reach out—afraid you're going to be violated when you're lying on your bed. And I've seen that, the few deaths I've seen.

So people don't ordinarily die in moments of clarity like Eddie Bonetti, thinking happy thoughts, ready to die and ready to choose a new life. A lot of time when they die, they don't know who they are.

NM: I can't answer that in that—you know, the real question is when do you die spiritually, and you can die spiritually an hour, a day, or a month or five years before your death. That may be when the question of rebirth is considered. I think as a harsh,

practical matter, the closer your soul can remain intact to the extinction of your body, the finer candidate you are for reincarnation. That's just my notion of the economy of. . .

JML: That's risky. . . You mean someone who really want to be reborn but goes into a coma loses their shot?

NM: Someone who goes into a coma—look, the soul can fight the body right down to the very end. The soul can say, "all right, I don't feel anything in my legs any more. I don't feel anything in my fingers. I don't feel anything in my thoughts, I can hardly think, but I know what I want, one way. That one way is more life, to be reborn." Or the soul can feel it isn't worth it. It simply isn't

worth it. "Let the body have its day. I've abused this body all my life, it's now claiming its wages, I'm bankrupt. . ."

But I do think that the soul—taking your lady at the hospice—if the soul leaves a week or two before the body, I think, economically speaking in terms of the transmigration of souls, it makes for a much messier travel schedule. You know, I have this feeling—everyone talks about death that there's this wonderful white light, and relatives come out to meet you, so forth and so on. I'm a touch cynical about that. Certain people, yes. They were close to their relatives and their relatives do come out.

But there's an awful lot of travel involved. The very schedules, the logistics of the hereafter, interest me because God's

energies, as I see it, are immense but they're not infinite. So there are all sorts of logical procedures after you die. It isn't all just spiritual inspiration. The stuff in New Age, and what can you say? The more flaming religions, the ones that promise everything in the hereafter just so you'll put something in the collection box—all that brings out my cynicism, which I consider my shield—not necessarily my sword but my shield against poor thinking. So it seems to me very often if we die, it's going to be a huge disappointment in the beginning. You may hang around in vast hall—it'll be like the first day in the Army, when nobody knew what to do with you and you're waiting to get assigned to some sort of temporary training platoon.

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Fourth Interview

Pages 1-98 Double spaced

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^{Virtually} made it best if ^{several not}
these are almost passive experiments by God. Or it may be the ^{to answer}

Or, does the devil dip ^{to churn up} devil dipping his toe into the water when you have some

Some particularly evil bacteria. On the other hand, *Counter to that, I have to* I don't have, I don't add

to be eradicated at all cost, and we should all live ~~300 years as part~~ ^{so that we can} ~~and populate the globe with ten billion people~~ ^{for centuries}
life and death. I will repeat: ~~of our life situation, I think life and death~~ ^{have} as you know them and

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that death is as great a test and as great an adventure as life. And

~~Just as we cannot~~

that no more could we conceive of an existence where there ~~was~~ ^{is}

only daylight and never night, so I can't ^{comprehend} conceive of life without

^(all or most of us, or some of us) death and rebirth. I think we all go back in again through the m

^{I will say} ^{at any rate} ~~and come out, and go in and come out, and so when we start~~

~~therefore that~~ ^{that} talking about karma, I don't have the remotest clue what we ^{may}

become in our next existence. It's possible, it's perfectly possible

that some or all of us have to descend to the bacteriological level

^{return} and come back from there. ~~I don't~~ ^{that} My guess is it's not that elaborate ^{a chain of reincarnation}

^{for that would proper} complicated ^{it makes for a very} complex universe. But what is

^{universe in the after-life} ^{I assume} ~~would say is I think~~ (there's a purpose for everything, including the

agents that tend to infect us and ~~infect us and~~ kill us. It may be

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there are agents of death ^{with which} God experiments ^{as} with full ~~as much as~~

~~God experiments with new kinds of life and with the development~~

~~and animal~~ *In that sense life and death*
of human life. Human life being the masterwork.
are counterparts of the same ongoing

JML: Death and life being related...

existence

NM: Not interrelated...

JML: Intertwined...

NM: Actually—not identical but part of the same existence.

JML: Yang and yin. Interpenetrating.

NM: OK.

JML: You've talked a lot about the moment of death and the state

of mind one is in at the moment of death—this follows, I think

from what you just said. Peace of mind, I think, is important to

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many religions—peace of mind at death, none more so than

Catholicism. Which actually has a sacrament called Extreme

Note to JML: CK w Sacrament

Unction [Mike, now called "Sacrament of the Sick" or some such]

which was created by the Church to give to people at the moment

of death.

NM: ~~Let me get this straight~~—what were the origins? How did

confidence in its
the Church arrive at this power?

JML: Well, ~~the Church~~ over ~~the history of~~ *the Church* a millennia, created

seven sacraments. And the last one *is Extreme Unction,* that was created was expressly

(which Father of the Church made)
~~created~~ I can't tell you who came up with the theology of it

(there is)
which Father of the Church, it was a sense of the Church reaching

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out to the individual at the moment of death and applying all of its

powers to giving that person peace of mind as they ^{passed} ~~passed~~ over

Q, at least, giving
NM: Giving them a belief in peace of mind. . .

JML: Yes, giving them the belief that ^{from the} ~~in the~~ Church's point of

view, Extreme Unction works—and I've seen people receive it

and you know, it ^{does} ~~gives~~ them tremendous peace of mind

NM: I ^{can} ~~believe that~~ it's effective. Certainly for devout Catholics, it

would be ~~effective~~. Let me tell you a small story about a dear

friend of mine, Eddie Bonetti, who was dying of cancer. And I

spoke to him a day before he ^{went} ~~died~~. He was a marvelous fellow, and I

you'll see from the conversation what his positive qualities were

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We were talking on the phone and he knew ^{death} ~~it was over~~ ^{close} ~~for him~~ .

~~to the end.~~ ^{And} ~~At~~ a given moment, I said to him, "Eddie

scared?" He said, "Yeah, Norman, I am, ⁴ ~~scared a little~~."

I said, "Eddie, it seems to me you have less reason to be

^{a friend} ~~scared~~ than anyone I know. Because you're the loyalest guy I've

^{met,} ever been in contact with. You've never turned your back on a

friend, no matter how much it cost you. I really can't believe that

something bad is waiting for you."

He said, "You really believe that, Norman?"

I said, "I think so, I really do."

And the woman he was living with at the time told me he ^{did die later that day with a smile} ~~did happily shortly after the conversation.~~ Which pleased me

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innumensely because I loved the guy and if I was any use to him ~~at~~ then,

well, I'm ~~to hope that~~ a little
 all, and I am tempted, naturally, my words had something to do

with his peace.

So, yes, I can believe ~~in~~ ^{that} Extreme Unction as something that ^{is}

^{some,} wonderful for people when they receive. I will say it's a human
 creation rather than a divine fact.
~~There were no miracles surrounding it,~~
~~creation, from what you tell me, there are no miracles, there was no~~

revelation from God. This was ^a ~~the~~ human attempt if you will to

understand how God's mind works. Now it was ^{brought on to} ~~done with great~~

~~being as a sacrament by the fathers of~~
~~the Church, which is to say it had power and~~
 backing, huge culture, much tradition, many decisions, committees

^{synods,}
~~arguing over it,~~ ^{debating} ~~which makes me dubious~~ coming up with the

sacraments one by one, developing them, using them, ^{keeping} ~~insisting~~
~~the ones that worked best~~

~~they knew more theology, I could talk about the sacraments they had~~

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~~sacraments that were~~
for a while then threw away because they weren't quite working.

In any event, they ended with these seven sacraments. With the mystical number seven, which again for so many people all over the universe, all over our world believe, that seven is an incredible number. I believe it too. I believe it's easier to believe that there's something right about the number than that it's wrong.

So, all right, yes, I can believe Extreme Unction ^{is there} works for a

devout Catholic. It might not work for someone like myself. If

someone came in and said, "You're going to die in peace." I'd

probably say, "Hey, cut it ^u ~~me~~ ^{go} ~~die~~." If you don't mind, I'll im-

tune my own end—you don't need to do it for me."

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Certain theologians would say, "Well, this is vanity. This is precisely why you're not going to have a good end." And my

feeling is, "Hey, pal, it's open. None of us know. It doesn't matter

how much tradition is behind it. Tradition suggests there may well

be something powerful behind it, but it ^{can hardly} ~~doesn't~~ prove it. ^{It's hardly} ~~not~~ ^{not for every human case.}

JML: Why is the state of mind at death so very important to you?

NM: Because I think it's our point of departure.

JML: So what? Everybody has a bad day. You could happen to

have a bad day on the day you die.

NM: No, no—whenever you have a bad day, there's a lot of

reasons for the bad day. I can give you 20 ^{Causes an ugly hour} reasons for a bad day -

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Some are serious, some ^{are} ~~are~~ passing. But, no, I won't hide ~~behind~~ -

~~that is,~~ I won't let you hide behind the notion of a bad day

JML: But there ^{are} ~~are~~ also days ^{when} we have false euphoria. We feel good

for no accountable reason and then the next day, we say, "Why did

I feel so good? I ^{still} ~~have~~ all these problems!"

NM: ~~There, I have my favorite notion. It is that it's karmic.~~

~~Whenever~~

~~Whenever we have an emotion we can't account for, good or bad,~~

~~expect that the root is karmic.~~

~~That may be~~

it's karmic. It's the only visitation we ^{receive} ~~can have~~ from previous lives,

~~which~~ ^{may well be} by the laws of the game, which are basic and necessary, we

can't know who we were and where we were in previous lives. ~~that~~

~~None the less,~~ intense and unaccountable something has happened that comes to us from a previous life and

emotions can come ~~from~~ ^{from} ~~the past~~ ^{one's karmic past} says, "Hey, this wonderful thing. I'm thinking about it, now you

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think about it too." Or in reverse: "There's doom approaching."

Get ready for it."

Now in that sense, unaccountable emotions are almost always

karmic.

But I'm not answering your question. I want to try to answer

~~it~~ I think at the moment we die, we are the ^{sum} result of all the good

and bad we've done, and all the courage and cowardice we've

exercised. ~~In other words, it can be drawn as an arrow of any~~

~~length and any intensity.~~ And so, for example, if we die with a

desire to be reborn, I think it means a great deal to God. If you

will, it's almost like we reach into a ^{little} ~~little~~ (and the one) to select a pup, ~~a pup that~~

^{who} catches our eye ~~that~~ we choose to take home. Using that crude

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analogy, I think if we die—Eliot's wonderful line, not with a bang

but a whimper"—which obviously ^{poetically} (obsessed Eliot, because Eliot

writing ^{is so often} was always ^{how we} based entirely on the idea of how would one

meet ^{our} ~~ends~~ death? If you approach his poetry with that in mind

The Wasteland ^{becomes} is a study of people who don't have a clue how to ^(pretend) ~~live~~

And yet it is ~~so~~ important to be ~~ready~~ ^{to} die. Along with everything else it is, but that's a large part of it.

After all, that is the one situation.

So in that sense, I think it's terribly important what our attitude is.

We can't ^{simulate} ~~fake~~ ^{can't} ~~pretend~~ ^{simulate} because we can't fake it. We can fake a huge number of emotion

in our lives ^{we may well} to ourselves, certainly to others, to our friends, to our enemies.

^{being what we are} ~~fake~~ ^{I would go} spend three-quarters of our lives acting. One of the reasons—this

^{go far as to say that one} is a cynical remark but I do enjoy it—one of the reasons people get

married ^{just a bit} is so they can be themselves. ^{a little bit} To wit, they don't have to present

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for stupor. God says, "Do I really want to go through this again

19, finally,
This person was really a great disappointment to me.

I believe final
You see, the notion I have is our judgment *(in this life)* comes in the form of

the form *(believe we've spoken of)*
of our rebirth. I think we spoke about this before. So in that case,

the divorce *meaning is our*
no need to repeat it. But I think the only judgment we get *placement in the next life. Often*
and places us to go
we're reborn. Or, very often, the decision is "No. No need to be

reborn. Off the board." True death. End of existence

JML: Someone told me recently

NM: Let me just finish

JML: Sorry

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NM: ~~What it comes down to, why the manner in which~~

your death is important, is if you have no desire to live again. 1.1

could be determinative.

JML: ^{to be} ~~I love the metaphor of the filter. That's beautiful~~

wonderful metaphor. Fabulous.

Jack: ~~But~~ I want to explore this ~~a little~~ more if I may. Several

thoughts. ^{from the house of 2/10} ~~One of them is that many people when they're dying~~

~~and~~ ³ a nurse told me this recently, a nurse who was a hospice nurse.

who cared for the dying, three times a week she went through this.

and she had great experience—~~she~~ told me that the end, often

because people were taking drugs, they'd be on morphine to cut the

^{and} pain, ^{and} their personality, as she put it, "dissolves." That they were

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live. they were functioning, but their soul ^{was} ~~is~~ already gone. And

for them, the death was before they died—the body was still

breathing, the automatic systems were working but—but indeed,

the people I have seen die, they revert ^{to} powerful impulses, powerful

atavistic impulses. The desire to keep oneself clean—they get on

the toilet when they're dying. The desire to remember one's mother

or grandmother. Or when someone touches you, the desire to

reach out—afraid you're going to be violated when you're lying on

your bed. And I've seen that, the few deaths I've seen.

So people don't ordinarily die in moments of clarity like

^(presumably)
Eddie Bonetti, thinking happy thoughts, ready to die and ready to

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choose a new life. A lot of time when they die, they don't know
who they are.

NM: I can't answer that ~~in that you know~~ the real question is

? You can pass away
when do you die spiritually, ~~and you can die~~ spiritually an hour, a

day, ~~or~~ a month or five years before your death. That may be when

and decided.
the question of rebirth is considered. I think as a harsh, practical

matter, the closer your soul can remain intact ^{up} to the extinction of

your body, the finer candidate you are for reincarnation. That's just

my notion ~~of the economy of...~~

^{So}
JML: That's risky. . . You mean someone who really wants to be

reborn but goes into a coma loses their shot?

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NM: ~~Someone who goes into a coma~~ ^{look}, the soul can fight the

body right down to the very end. The soul can say, "all right

^{Nothing is}
don't feel anything in my legs any more. I ~~don't feel anything in~~

^{can't find}
my fingers. I ~~don't feel anything~~ in my thoughts, I ~~can hardly~~

^{still}
think, but I know what I want, ~~one way~~. That ~~one~~ way is more I ~~feel~~ ^I

^{want} ^{for the contrary}
(to be reborn." Or the soul can feel it isn't worth it. ~~It simply isn't~~

~~worth it~~ "Let the body have its day. I've abused this body all my

^{demanding a cruel payment and}
life, it's now ~~claiming its wages~~, (I'm bankrupt. . ."

^{this intelligence from}
But I do think that the soul—~~taking your lady at the~~

hospice—if the soul leaves a week or two before the body, I think,

^{Dismissing the}
~~economically~~ speaking in terms of the ~~transmigration~~ of souls. It

^{could make} ^{more complex}
~~makes~~ for a ~~much messier~~ travel schedule. You know, I have it is

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so many feeling—~~everyone~~ *as a vision: 77-2-43* talks about death that there's *this wonderful*

white light, and relatives come out to meet you, ~~so forth and so on~~

subconscious I'm a touch cynical *For some* about that. Certain people, yes. They were

close to their relatives and their relatives do come out.

But there's an awful lot of *spirit* travel involved. The very

~~schedules~~ *T* the logistics of the hereafter, interest me because God's

energies, as I see it, are immense but *to repeat* they're not infinite. So there

are all sorts of *logistics to be followed* logical procedures after you die. It isn't all just

Economic procedures ~~involving~~ *if you will* the energies available to the hereafter, *spiritual inspiration*. The stuff in New Age, and what can you say

The more flaming religions, the ones that promise everything in the

hereafter just so you'll put something in the collection box ~~off the~~

hereafter

(brings out my cynicism, (which I consider my shield) ~~not~~

we
33 summer

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~~[necessarily my sword but my~~ shield against ^{wishful} ~~poor~~ (thinking) ~~scars~~

Often, I expect ~~when in the~~ ^{in the} ~~universe~~ ^{universe} seems to me very often if we die, it's going to be a huge ~~hours or days after our death~~ ^{hours or days after our death} ~~can be long waits~~ ^{can be long waits} ~~disappointment in the beginning.~~ ^{disappointment in the beginning.} You may hang around in a vast

~~hall—~~ ^{somewhat} ~~it'll be~~ like the first day in the Army, when nobody knew

what to do with you and you're ^{were} waiting to get assigned to some sort

of temporary training platoon. ~~And in that sense, there'd be a lot of~~

~~waiting around.~~ We can talk about limbo a little later on if you

wish. Limbo may be an absolutely realistic station for most people

when they die. That is, they hang around for quite a while ~~before~~

~~they're assigned.~~

^{limbo can} JMI.: ~~Could~~ ^{be} for years. ~~8~~

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NM: Well, I don't know. In the Catholic religion, there could be

an eternity ^{to} in limbo, but I think ^{(it could also be) divine} it's just a matter of bureaucratic

dare I say [?] it—mismanagement. Because bureaucratic

mismanagement on earth—I don't we know we necessarily have to

^{all that changes} assume it's all perfect in the hereafter. ~~God and his angels.~~ I don't

think angels are perfect any more than I believe demons are totally

evil. I think the rarest condition in existence is absolute purity of

^{variety living or cut by glaciers into stone,} any ~~sort~~

^{cannot be} If God is a Creator, then God is ~~not~~ absolutely pure, ^{because} ~~creation~~ ^{creation consists in part of} ~~upon one's errors, and offering less pure~~ ^{improving} ~~those~~

JML: What about people—we've all heard about people who

^{after living} die—~~they live~~ lives of greed and misery, they're rotten people.

^{to} ~~only~~ ^{to} ~~vice~~

detestable in every way, but at the last minute, the last few weeks

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they call in the priest, they get a seraphic smile on their face, they

have money, perhaps, they're surrounded by servants, and they go

off into the hereafter feeling very good about themselves

Deluded, perhaps, about their ultimate worth, but nonetheless

smiling, saying their prayers. They haven't gone to a church or

done anything decent—

NM: Well, you're creating an imaginary person. .

JML: There are people like that who die happy after living a

miserable life.

NM: Who says they died happy? They could be acting in the end,

~~number one.~~

JML: That's the moment you said you don't act.

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NM: No, ~~no, no~~. I said people who are serious about their soul

don't act. In other words, they may be acting for others, ^{but} ~~they~~

not acting before ~~God~~ ^{eternity}.

I'll give you an explanation why a truly rotten person can die

happy, which is they were so rotten in ^{their} ~~the~~ previous existence. ^{the} ~~the~~

^{be like this one, that} ~~this life~~ ^{proved to be a spiritual}
(this life, bad as it was, ~~was an~~ improvement over the previous one)

~~Really, I've seen this karmic chain.~~ They die happy because they

feel everything considered, considering how bad were their

beginnings, and how absolutely loathesome the initial impulses

they were born with, they have gotten ^{better under the circumstances} ~~older~~. We all know people

who were total pricks their entire lives who mellow a little bit at

the end. That's another human quality.

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JML: But you said all the good and evil in one's life is ~~summed up~~

summed up in death and I'm thinking of those who are miserable

people for the first 95% of their lives and then they're sweet old

people at the end—doesn't seem very just that they should have a

happy death. You'd think somehow they should have a miserable

death. Where's the fairness in things?

I think
NM: ~~Listen~~ you're speaking too hypothetically. Hypothetical

~~Speculations~~ of the sort I go in for make me most uneasy when

indulge themselves
~~about~~ others ~~occasion them~~. I mean, this person you're talking about — as

him
a novelist I find ~~them~~ impossible to conceive in my head ~~in other~~

~~words~~, People who are rotten all their lives rarely end up sweet at

the end. If they do—there is such a thing as truly evil and ugly

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impulses wearing out and burning out. Just as good people start
ugly people can die in a more benign state. They've used up the
ugliness in themselves. They've been rotten to people, horrible to
people, and maybe they feel a bit of contrition at the end. Your
religion is based on that.

JML: Absolutely.

NM: Between the stirrup and the ground. I've always found it
excessively sentimental and too easy: be evil all your life and as

you're falling from the horse, before you head is ^{knocked off} ~~severed from your~~

body---

JML: Say a perfect Act of Contrition!

NM: ~~What?~~

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JML: ~~You make a perfect Act of Contrition.~~

Yes!
NM: I've always found that ~~a little~~ extreme. And a little

convenient. The Catholic Church is not only a study in immense

what
but an applied skill in
human wisdom, it's a study in immense skill ~~at~~ human mechanics.
at maneuvering our thoughts around the tightest corners

JML: It's thought of almost everything. It has an answer for

almost everything, every issue. [tape off, back on again]

You spoke a little bit about limbo but I don't recall that you
said much about purgatory—as an idea, as a place, as a metaphor.

Of course, it's a wonderful metaphor, we all use it. What is your

idea of purgatory as a metaphor, *?* ~~as~~

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NM: well, as a metaphor—we're talking about the same thing.

tell me
We're speaking of hell, endless torture—no purgatory, is a

temporary station. *?*

JML: It may last for a millennia, but it's temporary.

I confess, I don't know these concepts
NM: Wait a moment, there's heaven, purgatory, and hell and *Does*
words as well as I should. I think
and have any relation to
limbo. Limbo *is* the precursor to purgatory or heaven?

there
JML: No. Limbo is the place for people on whom God can't make

a judgment. They died before they were baptized or something

like that.

NM: Oh, Christ! I've found that—the old Marxists used to say,

that religion is not, absolutely meaningless and silly. When you

get into that. . .

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JML: I agree. The Church doesn't even talk about limbo ^A anymore.

They've almost dropped it as a concept. But purgatory.

NM: Now purgatory. . . yes.

JML: Purgatory is not endless. There is an end to your suffering.

The amount of time you're there and what kind of suffering you have, according to the Catholic Church, would depend on what your crimes were.

NM: I see purgatory in altogether different terms. The notion that if you suffer long enough you'll purge yourself—I don't see any

reason to have that in the hereafter. ^{I would suggest instead} ~~I see~~ that being reborn takes

care of purgatory. For some people, ^{indeed,} life is purgatory. For a few

people, life is heaven—they're happy 90% of the time. For some

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people, life is hell. I don't think we need these other structures.

think we pay our debts through our reincarnations. That makes

much more sense to me than these immensely wasteful places ~~called~~
heaven and hell

where nobody does anything, where nothing's brought back into

the divine economy, people are just marking time.

I see God, if you will, as ~~Faustian~~ ^{being as} aiming to go further. God

is not satisfied with ~~his or her~~ ^{it all to} creation, God wants to take it

become better further. Therefore, wasteful procedure ^{is} ~~are~~ anathema to God, ~~So~~

~~always see~~ ^{there is} I do see heaven, purgatory and hell, as wasteful

procedures. ^{who} ~~Nobody~~ ^{after all} can speak interestingly of heaven, ~~Sh~~

made the best single attempt and decided heaven was boring. And

~~there is~~ ^{there is} that's always the uneasy little feeling people ~~always have~~ ^{after} ~~My~~

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For me, is a sense of
NM: Purgatory, ~~is the sense of~~ *to me, of possibly temporary*

living, over temptations and
immense conflict between ~~indecision and an overweening sense of~~ *at one's*

responsibility. Purgatory ~~When we feel dread, we're not that far~~

Feel from purgatory. We ~~know~~ *could be taking* something very important ~~is happening~~

place in our soul) *we're full of fear of taking*
to us, but we don't know what, and we're afraid to take the step we

now believe ~~think~~ *is demanded of us. Most men* meet purgatory in terms of

their personal courage. If they're afraid—if they're afraid of

playing football, putting on a ~~suit~~ *the pads* and going out to play can be

purgatory. Boxing can be purgatory. Skiing ~~can be purgatory~~ *off the front*

is steep and
is narrow enough and the mogs are
formidable, can certainly realize your
Bungee-jumping can be purgatory—brief but intense purgatory . .

Men—now women are beginning to search for that purgatory a

well. It used to be that women's purgatory was related to the

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terrors of childbirth. After all, in the Middle Ages, there was the

chance in ten ^{a woman} ~~one~~ would die in ~~any~~ childbirth. That was ~~at the~~

purgatory, a true terror. One had to face ~~the~~ ultimates to have a

child.

JML: How limbo and purgatory came about, if I'm remembering

correctly, in the thinking of Christianity was they began with

notions of heaven and hell borrowed from other religions because

there were previous religions that had ^{both} ~~heaven and hell~~. Then they

~~became more~~ ³ the structure of the church became more complex

and people asked questions. What if you've been bad but not so

bad you should be condemned to eternal hellfire—you've only

been sort of bad—and the Church said, "you're right, we have a

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place for those people where they have modest suffering. The
 people said, "what about people outside the Church? We've been
 told they're condemned but what if they haven't done anything
 evil? They died at 3 years old—they were a wonderful little child
 but were never baptized. . ." The Church said, "we have a place for
 them too." So the Church was trying to create—I'm sure they
 would have created another place if they'd had to. But ultimately,
 the Church began to see the folly of limbo—what a ridiculous idea
 for people to live in a big empty ^{space} hall forever and no positive
 thing ~~there was no positive~~ pain but no positive joy [?] perfect
 natural happiness" said the Baltimore Catechism—no beatific
 vision but otherwise OK] ~~You've used the word.~~

For ~~the~~
 ↓
 will
 from
 3 men

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NM I've mis-used it. As you were speaking, I was thinking in the

piece I wrote, I was thinking about purgatory, not limbo.

Sometime I'll have to put a footnote in that piece because that was

purgatory I was thinking of.

JMU.: We talked about saints but I never got to my question about

demons. I remember you told me some time ago you had an

encounter with a demon. Or a succubus or—whatever you want to

in a ^{room you rented} ~~house~~ ^{week end} ~~you lived in for a number~~ of weeks
 call it, right here on Commercial Street in Provincetown. Would it

be worthwhile to say anything about that experience? How does it

relate to your theology? ~~Does it fit into your theology, that~~

~~experience?~~

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NM: Yes. ~~But it doesn't say much. Let me say stop this~~~~moment [tape off tape back]~~ I won't get into it, Mike, because ittakes too long to tell and there's no real point ~~to it. I can't~~ an

certainly speak of succubi and incubi in the abstract sense. I think

they would be instruments ~~or tools~~ of the devil, and most useful ~~to~~~~you really, when you~~ *I only (such a presence)* I've only felt in once in my life and itseemed to come out of nowhere, which is why I don't ^{much} ~~want~~ to talk~~about it because~~ *simply why it was there* I don't understand ~~it~~ but I really felt as if there

were some intangible creature fastened to my chest. I do have a

story that may be worth telling about a poetess named Mina ~~only~~*Something like seventy or seventy-five years ago*

she was in a small hotel in the Left Bank in Paris and one night in

her room, she felt this hideous oppression, ~~and~~ *monstrous* this hideous.

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intangible creature, ^{which} yet ^{most} seemed nonetheless ^{and} very alive, ^{and} seemed.

fastened to her chest ^{and} she lived in horror through the night ^{and} ~~she~~

~~abominably wretched~~
was very shaken in the morning, ^{and} she went downstairs to ~~get~~

~~drink some coffee~~ ^{the} breakfast on the terrace of ~~this~~ little hotel ^{she was staying in} just across the street from

the Seine. Alastair Crowley, the famous ^{and notorious} magician, was there, ~~and~~

~~a table or two away, and~~
~~he~~ was talking about a man he detested who was also staying at the

hotel. And ^{Crowley} he said, "You know, last night I sent an incubus to

invade him, ^{yet} ~~and~~ I saw ^X him this morning and he looked perfectly all

right. I don't understand it." ~~Well~~ Mina Loy's comment was ~~the~~

~~told the story to friends~~ ^{was} "Let no one say Alastair Crowley

has no powers. It's just that they're misdirected."

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JML: Let me shift then to talk about wealth and poverty I've

listened to the last interview we did and ~~at several points~~ *in the tape*

~~fairly comprehensive nature of your belief system~~ *it occurred to me*

↙
~~me~~ you never addressed this at all.

NM: Wealth and poverty?

JML: ~~Wealth and poverty~~ My question is this: ~~wealth and~~

~~poverty are evolutionary assets~~, Are they predetermined by God as

karmic agents? ~~Do we get the tap on the shoulder~~ "OK, it's a go"

↘
~~For you~~ are wealth and poverty just part of the package? *How*

much of wealth and poverty is a result of what God gives you

when you're born and how much *comes from* ~~is~~ the accidents of the economic

jungle?

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NM: The poor believe they're going to be rewarded in the next

~~life.~~ ^{also} ~~a good many of them~~ ^{also} ~~believe they're going to be rewarded in the next~~ ^{life.}

life. The Egyptians, for example, believed you had no chance

whatsoever in the hereafter unless you were ^{truly} wealthy, indeed, you

had to be buried in such a way that you were ^{prepared} ~~fortified~~ to travel

through the underworld. The Egyptians believed ^{that} when you died

you had to pass through the underworld in order to reach the ^{other} ~~other~~

~~version of the~~ ^{the} Elysian fields [GK ~~wasn't the Elysian fields a Greek term?~~ Did.

~~the Egyptians have a specific term for paradise?~~ And for that you

~~needed all sorts of protections.~~ ^{Priests used to pray for} You needed priests praying for ^{you} ~~you~~ ^{sent onto your death} ~~you~~ ^{were attached} ~~you~~ ^{also} ~~you~~ ^{needed} amulets strapped to your corpse, you needed

prayers ~~being~~ said by your relatives, you needed a tomb that would

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protect you from evil spirits when you needed rest—you ~~wouldn't~~ ^{couldn't}

out and explore the land/ the underworld, then you'd come back.

~~your tomb. Finally, with all that, sometimes you made it through!~~

the underworld and sometimes you didn't. They used to have a

prayer: "Oh, ~~God~~ ~~who was Amon~~ "do not let me die a second

time in the Land of the Dead." The Egyptians believed in the

second death ~~which~~ was final. The first ~~death~~ was provisional

you get through the underworld into the Elysian fields, you could

live forever. So, for them, wealth was crucial. Which is why you

have that phenomenon of a land, an early land and civilization.

with most people living at a subsistence level and absolute

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Out there is

fabulous wealth at the top. At the top of the pyramid were the

Pharaohs:

I think that belief carries over. Sometimes people who ~~were~~ ^{are}

might
abstemious ~~would~~ look with horror on rich people who ~~will~~ have gold

and dishes
plates under the serving plates for dinner. But the rich obviously

that the after world to enable ~~people~~ ^{people} believe the way the world is structured, people who are rich have

who are rich to have more of a purchase on
more of a purchase on the afterworld than the poor. Not all rich *(eternally)*

on the land of the dead on the
Not all rich ~~people~~ ^{people} ~~feel~~ ^{feel} through their philanthropy ~~maybe~~ ^{maybe}
feel guilty, late in life, they pursue

~~late~~ philanthropy—they're terrified of the hereafter. They know

what they did to get that wealth and they are in terror

Then

There are the poor—some of whom are just bitter and furious

They

and feel they were absolutely denied any kind of chance at any

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existence at all, ^{they} and are ~~very~~ angry at God ^{also} ~~then~~ you have the ~~door~~

who believe ^{that} ~~no~~, no, it's all right, I've lived a clean life. I've lived

a good life, I've raised my children, done my best. I've never

despaired and I'm going to go to a good place.

^{separate outlooks, young}
We have these phenomena and we also have the question ^{for}
~~So those who believe in a~~
~~continuous after death~~
^{my guess}
"Well, how does it work?" And at a guess, I would think there is a

^{ongoing}
great deal of negotiation between God and the devil over who ^{levels} ~~wins~~

where. In other words ~~you know the old story about negotiation~~

When both parties walk away somewhat dissatisfied from the

result, it's been a good, clean negotiation.

So I'm assuming by now that not only is God not all-powerful

^{all-conquering & then the two}
powerful but the devil is not all-conquerable. You can truly have

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^{one}
~~two~~ systems in deep contest with one another. And so, the devil

~~there ^{are} ~~are~~ ^{with} ~~excluded~~~~
would not want to be separated completely from the possibility of

^{might desire to have}
rebirth. The devil ~~will want to have a say. And the say that the~~

^{has}
~~devil would want would be some of the rich people could be taken~~

care of.

JML: It's "my people can be taken care of."

^{also}
NML: Now, of course, if you ~~obviously~~, there are rich people who

are close to saintly, who manage to live with their wealth in such a

way that it hasn't corrupted them. I think ^{that's} rare ^{also} — but it ~~certainly~~

^{occurs}
~~exists~~, we've all known a few. They are lovely people sometimes

Not all rich people are awful, but a great many rich people ~~are~~ ^{are}

~~But that category~~ ^{are certainly in no}
~~And particularly when they're new to wealth~~ ^{shape to look at the}
~~the conceptual~~

^{eye of the needle,}

theology speculation tape 4, transcript, 8/20/04

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~~nouveau riche is not a small one. They very often lead lives that~~

~~disgust many people. Nonetheless, there is also a certain energy in~~
you can find
live

~~the rich, some of the rich, not all. But some of the rich made the~~
then

~~money through huge energy. Not all people who gain power~~
after all their
as a rule

~~just through dirty means. They just as often gain it through~~
Soul

~~intensity of energy that's greater than other people's~~

~~So, the hereafter is~~ *as seen by and*
to be
~~So it's a complex matter for the rich. I think God is perfect~~
expect

~~willing to discriminate. Certain~~ *of the* ~~rich people, yes, absolutely let~~

~~send them forward to be born again. They're interesting~~
out *from promotion*

~~them around again. Then, there's certain people the devil will have~~

~~to smuggle in. The imaginary dialogue.~~
Follow

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particular emblem
"Surely you don't want that awful collection of old ~~mess~~ any."

~~old~~ turds surrounded by gold!"

The devil says, "You never did know how to comprehend

excrement
that type. I have a better feeling for ~~them~~ ^{these people} than you do."

God: "All right. I'll give you that ~~one~~ ^{follow} if you release those

~~woman~~
two to me. . ."

I'm speaking in excessively speculative. . . I'm making a
comedy out of it. The reason is I'm not sure of my ground. I have
to retreat. This is a tough one for me today.

Are you saying that God will
JML: But you're saying to me, the possibilities of wealth ~~some~~

people can be born and actually be endowed ~~with~~ ^{some for us} with the power to be

wealthy, or actually be born ^{again} into great wealth? Or ~~into poverty~~

theology speculation tape 4, transcript, 8/20/04

NM: Born into wealth is another matter [side one ends] The

question is—you're saying God may want certain people to be born into wealth.

JMI: Or into poverty.

Why not?
NM: Yes. Absolutely. It's a species of testing. I think one aspect

of wealth and poverty in karma I find very interesting is certain

in rich and favorable circumstances
people who were very high born in one life and were spoiled and then

grew
ended up having lives that were disappointing by the highest

might be,
~~measure~~ are reborn as poor people. There are other people who are

Others who were
~~never got it through their heads~~
poor who can simply never get it through their heads that they're

that they were deprived. They have a touch
~~poor. They have a certain~~ aristocracy innate in them. And there

are rich people who have the modesty of poor people. I think you

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find that all the time—these are ^{not only} spiritual tests ^{one} function of

reincarnation is to give God ^{further} deeper insights into the people ^{He} is

she is dealing with. I go back to the fundamental premise: God

does not understand us completely any more than we understand

our children. We ^{can know them} understand our children quite well, but we

~~of their habits and attitudes~~, but

~~we~~ certainly don't understand them ^{in all ways} perfectly. So God wants to know

more ~~and more and more~~ about ^{His} creation, and the devil, many

times, is attempting ^{precisely} to muck up ^{each} God's clarity.

JML: ~~This works very well~~, I don't have any disputes on the

individual level, but when I think of that phrase of Adam Smith:

"the wealth of nations," there are some peoples, some nations who

have lived in terrible, terrible misery. Take one nation I know

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little about, the Irish. For 500, 600 years they lived under British

wealth and power and now it seems almost just that the Irish are

richer than the English.

NM: Are they? I didn't know that.

JML: Yes. They ^{have} surpassed them. In per capita income now the

Irish passed the British—they're the wealthiest nation in the

European Union.

NM: Why are they so wealthy?

JML : Because they took over a lot of the finances and the

entrepreneurship and the banking, and they have a great gift of

languages and various abilities, and now they're the banking center

of Europe. They've just done it.

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delete page

NM: Per capita income—I know, but if 3% of the population is immensely wealthy. . .

JML: No, no, no. It's spread throughout the country. You know, the Irish for many years ^{were} trying to get Americans to come back and live there with free citizenship, my wife has it. They've cut it off. "We don't want any more people any more! ~~We don't want more people coming in to be part of Ireland.~~" Ireland was ~~being~~ depopulated for hundreds of years. Now people are going there because ~~they want~~ the standard of living is so high, all that ^{has} money that was invested ^{has} returned at a great rate. But I'm thinking of the poverty, the potato famine, the de-population, two or three million people died over there. . .

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NM: I'll give you another example. ^{Four thousand years} The 800 or 1000 or 1200-

^{and more} years the Jews lived in the ^{ghetto} ~~ghetto~~ and what happened? They

^{on farm} weren't allowed to hunt or fish in most parts, they were allowed to

^{on inn-keepers or own shops} be money-lenders ^{and they could live} in their own communities a -

~~shopkeepers, whatever.~~ So what did they do? They gave

^{I would say that the results} everything they had to their schools, and it got into the gene

^{stream - those ghetto Jews} stream ^{learning and} ~~stream~~ they became immensely intelligent people. ^{put their emphasis on intelligence} Because that

^{because their own books, particularly the Talmud,} ~~was still open to them.~~ was what they were obliged to me. So the Irish in a certain sense

~~learned they had to be - I'm guessing they have the ability to.~~

~~live with fine economy and high levels of money.~~

JML: ~~So~~ If you look at all the plusses and minuses of all the

nations—great wealth in some and great poverty in others—now

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does that mesh in with ~~all~~ the individual ^{decisions} things God and the world

^{express}
~~are doing~~

with reincarnation? It seems God may have to give up a

whole country or a whole nation or whole race of people for long

periods.

NM: I don't want to get carried away with understanding God's

motives ~~in every situation~~. I'm looking to find a few general

principles. . .

JML: You're looking at individuals. I'm asking you to look at

^{nations}
from a ~~Marxist~~ point of view.

NM: That means first, you have to believe in races. I do to

certain extent. It's completely incorrect these days to talk about

^{such matters,}
~~races~~

but I think no, the very mixture of climate and language.

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~~through many, does~~
around over (centuries produces) one kind of person as opposed to
another kind. ~~There are differences. I think that's~~ ^{That may now be} part of God's

interest in us as individuals. "Will this particular man or woman

turn out better or worse than I think he or she will?" God's also

interested in races—how will they turn out?

JML: In nations.

NM: Yes. And also in nations—which, obviously, are not races.

~~They're often~~ ^{far} more complicated.

JML: God must be thinking a lot about China, with ^{3.06} ~~two~~ billion—

~~(three billion) people. . . [CK— isn't it ONE billion out of 6 billion—~~

~~total population planet-wide? Still impressive.]—~~

theology speculation tape 4 , transcript, 8/20/04

5

JML: Nobody ever talks about the mirror. . .

Delet: 12-07-12

NM: ~~You~~ ever thought about it? The first mirror that was made?

JML: The first mirror was water.

NM: Yes, but that was highly imperfect. Highly imperfect. The

~~least bit of wind could distort~~ *the picture*

~~JML: It killed Narcissus.~~

~~NM: In myth.~~

~~JML: Yes.~~

~~NM: I think the mirror had a profound effect. Gunpowder had~~

~~profound effect. The safety match—not even the safety match, the~~

~~match. The wheel.~~

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JML: That's interesting. I didn't necessarily mean technology

meant a war, a battle, a birth—could be the discovery of a nation --

you know, Columbus. . .

NM: I think it's too broad.

JML: Last time we spoke, you ^{got into} ~~talked about~~ evolution a lot, and atAt one point you said ~~I may have this wrong that~~ God waslearning about evolution as ^{he} ~~it~~ went along.

NM: Yes. God learns.

*Judi: I've
felt ~~that~~ ^{have}
time. I
can't ~~be~~ ^{be} the.
You know that*

JML: Then in those early periods of time, with slime covering the

^{when} oceans ~~and~~ land had just been created, ^{you indicated that} ~~that maybe~~ God was in the^{yes, is there} slime of early creation (evolving with everything else. Yet you also

said with great assurance that God is the creator of the world and

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the solar system. I was having trouble reconciling God in the slime
and God as the creator—

NM: ~~Well, if I contradict myself, I wouldn't get bogged down with it.~~

I lean to the notion God is the ⁶creator—or, what's the word I'm

looking for—the factotum of the solar system. The notion that

God is something we can conceive in unified form is— I don't

necessarily adhere to that. Suppose God is the lord of the solar

system but at the same time, had to learn how to develop the

from the slime on up
system, ~~not just the slime.~~ (Most people, myself included, have in

great trouble believing Jesus was the son of God—but God was

many things and looked to become more and ^{He} searched and ^{He} learned

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God learned. ~~We can come back to that~~ dare I call it this -

our slogan.

JML: No, I think it's a good rule. But I think where we got

logged down at that particular point of the discussion was when

Yes, but when

did God put the souls into creation?

NM: ~~How do I know?~~ Why would I know? ~~I think at a certain~~

point...

JML: ~~It must have started at a certain point...~~ It had to

has to (at this point.)
 NM: That's where our understanding becomes lame. How much

of God is in every house fly? Something, *perhaps* maybe. Something ~~the~~

point is...

JML: The soul is ~~something~~ special...

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NM: You have to conceive of God as being [long pause] /x

put it? Immensely differentiated. So that the life we see in a fish

those wonderful moves, ^{yes,} that came from the Creator. He gave that

to the fly. Did he give the fly ^a conscience? Did he give the ^{it. a} ~~fly~~ a conscience?

sense of proportion, ⁷⁷ give him the power to have interesting

conditions? ~~No, probably not.~~ Probably not. The key to the

notion is ^{that} it's all been a huge experiment, an ongoing, developing

experiment with endless results, most of them good enough so that

despite its ^{the} evolution continued, with failures all over the place. God learns,

God learns. ~~God learns.~~ And so God invests himself or herself in

all sorts of creatures en route. Not only animals but flora as well.

JML: So the creation of the soul was not a historic event

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NM: Who knows? It could have been. The Bible seems to have a lot to say about this.

\$0.

JMI: At a given moment God created human beings and gave them a soul.

NM: But that doesn't mean it's so.

~~JML~~: Well, if you believe in the soul . . .

~~NM~~ - I believe in the existence of the soul but I don't believe in the -

iron authenticity of the Old Testament and the New Testament

Booth,

~~They were both written by committee.~~ The Old Testament was.

put together over a long period by a series of
written by a very talented committee, much more talented than
the latter-day Bible-builders,
people who wrote the New Testament. On the other hand, the
composed

people who wrote the New Testament were ^{also} fine scholars and they

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were familiar with

knowing the best remarks that had been made up to that point, ~~and~~

Old Testament and by many a great prophet and ~~that~~ mystic, and they used them, they used them all through. And they were attached to a concept

also

that may or may not be true. May well be true. Which is ^{that} Jesus was

the son of God. And they were serious. Both committees were

they were still a ⁱⁿ immensely serious but they were committees. And as literary

works, the Old Testament has some faults and the New Testament a great many. And to accept them as the absolute

therefore

map of our ^{spiritual} universe is comparable to the kind of ^{using} ~~map~~ ^{charts} Christopher

Columbus had ^{before him} when he set out for the West. So ^{our} ~~the~~ idea that the

beginning as presented

soul was created in the first three sentences of Genesis ^{is} ~~represents~~

Salge
a concept.

In fact, ^{studied classical} ~~once~~ I started studying Hebrew and the first sentence

of Genesis—have we discussed that?

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7.

JMI: No.

NM: Well, ^{as} you know: "In the beginning, God created the heavens

Or so it goes in English. Actually: the
and the earth." The first word of the Old Testament in Hebrew

is "baraishit boraud" [sp???? CK] and "baraishit" is a ^{most} very odd

singular.

word in classical Hebrew. The only place it exists in the ^{of} ~~enum.~~ ^{all}

language is in the first word of the Old Testament, ^{that} ~~And "barama"~~ ^{"baraishit"}

and the second is ^{"bora"} ~~"bora"~~ ^{"baraishit"}

is "being." There are many interpretations of "baraishit" but ^{"Bora"} ~~are~~ ^{is}

up with "out of the pits. . ." or "out of the depths. . ." ~~"God"~~

"being" or "creating". So the first ^{two words} ~~words~~
say "Being becoming," or "being coming out of pits."
~~created~~ it's not "the heavens and the earth," it's "the firmament" ^{pits.}

~~The next words are not "the heavens and the earth" but "the firmament"~~

above" and "the firmament below," which is altogether different

as it to declare

The idea that there are ~~these~~ two species of existence from in

theology speculation tape 4, transcript. 8/20/04

~~commencement~~ And then
word go, dualism. And what's the next sentence? "The breath"

God moved upon the waters. . ."

JML: "The breath of God upon the waters. . ."

NM: It's not "breath of God" at all. The word is ^{used here for breath} "ruach" in

classical Hebrew. And in classical Hebrew there are three ^{varieties} ~~species~~
^{of breath to signify}
of God's presence in "breath." There's "ruach," "nefesh," and

"neshamah." "Neshamah" if I recall correctly, is ^a the gentle breath

And "nefesh" is ^{a normal wind} the average breath, and "ruach" is the fierce breath,

^{God's} the line really says, and ~~and~~
the angry breath, the rage. So it's "and in the rage of God he

^{vape} So, to go back, the first ~~was~~
roared over the waters." So the first sentence could well be . . .

sentences can be translated as "Being ~~was~~
translated, "Out of the pits, God created the firmament above and
becoming out of the pits"

theology speculation tape 4 , transcript, 8/20/04

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the firmament below. And ^{God's} his fierce breath roared over the
waters."

JML: Much different.

^{Altogether}
NM: ~~Much different.~~ Totally different. And since I'm suspicious

^{I always assume they}
of committees, it ~~might be they wanted~~ you know, they were ,

^{are looking to make}
~~making soporifics and~~ pastel candies for people from the word go

~~JML: Have you ever talked about this translation with anyone?~~

NM: You know my work as well as anyone. It's in my work, it's in

Ancient Evenings. Some of the Egyptians are talking about these

Hebrews. I've read about it several places. [tape off and back

again]

technology speculation tape 4, transcript, 8/20/04

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JML: We've spoken a bit about technology. I'd like to go ^{to another level} ~~to another level~~

~~at a~~ ^{very} basic level, ~~which you've led us down to, perhaps simplistic~~

~~One, the simplistic: you talk to somebody who's not educated -~~

~~about technology—it's simply a way of extending our muscles and~~

~~minds over greater distances and doing more work. I know there's~~

~~more to it than that—the deadening effect. But~~ ^{most of humanity}

^{and give} sees it as a way to free us from drudgery, ~~giving~~ ^{giving} us leisure time to

read and think and travel, ~~and~~ so forth. Why shouldn't it be seen

on balance—on balance—I understand all the bad things about it -

but why shouldn't technology be seen as largely salutary? Is

technology inherently evil or is it just misused? Misused by the

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devil or misused by God? Is it inherently evil or is it something

God lost control of? Or the devil appropriated?

NM: I think God lost control of it. I have four words to describe

technology which I've used several times now: more power less

pleasure. I think there's no getting around it: we can't pretend

comes to us
~~there's more pleasure from technology.~~ It tends to crimp our

and
senses, to reduce us to people who can live in a closed

environment. ~~The extensions we get from it~~

→
~~The real argument is: is it worth it?~~ My notion--it's a

is that
sentimental notion, doubtless, ~~but it's that~~ God would have

preferred us to be able to do ~~all~~ the things we can do through

by means of
technology through our spirit. In other words, instead of having

theology speculation tape 4, transcript, 8/20/04

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reach
television, we could tune into our dreamlife and have very

and that for ourselves or ~~others~~ ^{be} organized marvelous dramas we could each create. The ultimate to

aim was for every human being to be immensely creative. And ^{people}

~~psychic~~ ^{so that we would not have needed electronic} ^{communication}
If I wanted to talk to you, I could be able, in a certain

sense, to have my mind reach yours. We all have small intimations

mental) such powers become ~~communication~~
of that. It seems to me they're getting reduced more and more and

more reduced with every advance
more-
in technology.

As a specific example, I now use hearing aids and I can't hear

without them, most of the time, not with most people. But my ^{ability to hear gets}

hearing gets worse all the time. My sense of hearing gets more and

by using
more reduced the more I use my hearing aids. So I think

technology tends to curtail our possibilities ultimately ^{and accelerate}
our deplanning

theology speculation tape 4 , transcript. 8/20/04

And ^{have been} after all, the great strides that were made in technology ~~didn't come from these generations, they came from previous~~
generations. Maxwell discovered some of the differences between
electricity and magnetism. Farraday—some of the great scientists
of the 19th century took imaginative, metaphorical leaps to produce
the beginnings of technology. ~~Now we're down to a series of~~ ^{part 15}
~~and test tubes.~~ Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill didn't

have to study previous speeches to come up with the Gettysburg

Address ^{as} ~~and~~ "I have nothing to offer you but blood, sweat, toil, and
tears—" They came out of a past that depended on ^{individual} human beings

~~themselves to come up with~~ ^{rising to} marvelous solutions ^{at} to incredible

moments. ^{They were not dependent}
^{curious machines they did not really understand}

theology speculation tape 4, transcript, 8/20/04

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*As a small example,**I don't know anyone who has a computer who does not talk*
with

about the glitches.

JML: But I don't see—*look*, the first person to use a wheel after

the drudgery of dragging things—they must have felt great

pleasure. I don't see—

NM: Wait a moment, wait a moment—~~look, look, look~~, here are:crucial turning points, ~~crucial turning points~~ in the advent of *modern* ~~modern~~*back call that now*
technology, and ~~the~~ the center of ~~it all~~ is electronics. Now, ~~when the~~*Whereas the**First*wheel was made, ~~it was made~~ of wood and stones were used to*sharp**it*shape the first rough wheel. These *were* ~~are~~ things people could

comprehend, they came out of the earth. Then people began to

learn how to smelt ore. Dangerous business, tricky, but they *found* ~~learned~~

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~~make metal out of melting ore, ways to get fire to melt the ore to~~ ^{the means}

~~get slag and separate the slag from the molten metal. And the Iron~~ ^{so could}

Age began.

~~But~~ I say there's a profound difference between early

technology and later technology. Early technology, ^{let us} which ~~say~~

~~went right~~ through to the 19th century, consisted of dealing with

very powerful and explosive elements in nature and mastering

them, so there was ^{awe and} a ~~certain~~ excitement ^{to it} to it. There was ~~huge~~

^{See the railroad} excitement ~~to the~~ train when it was developed—people loved to

^{them} travel on ~~trains~~. They might be ^{cramped and} uncomfortable, ~~it~~ could smell bad.

but they were exciting. ~~But~~ how traveling on airplanes is

disagreeable. Everyone thought it'd be immensely exciting but it

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isn't. It's reductive. You don't feel like a voyager, *so much as you feel like a*

a piece of packaged goods. *So in that sense, it's electronics that is*

is the great divide—the watershed between what I would call good

technology and bad. Because no one knows what electronics is.

reach my mind with an
defy a fine physicist to tell me what electronics is all about. We
explanation I can comprehend. For that

matter, we don't even
don't know what electricity is. It's a current. A current of

anything/
yes, *about the real nature*
electrons, but do we know what an electron is?

make up of an electron? Does it possess
its own consciousness or not?

JMI.: So that's the pivot point, then? That's when technology

loses its ability to generate any pleasure or satisfaction and

becomes a miserable activity?

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NM: Well, if you want to take it that far. Obviously, certainly

people really enjoy their technology but then, they may already be

in a state of misery without knowing it.

JM1: But when you were a boy, the radio—you must remember

the radio—

NM: The radio was still something you could put together [NB

people happily build their own computers for fun—not

professionals, serious hobbyists.] I never was a kid who put radios

together.

JM1: The crystal set and all that.

NM: You had to do solder, ^{make more} ^{YES} connections, stuff like that—now, who

can build a computer? [see above!] Even then, you had to build it

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stark, you remember, the awful smell of plastic clothes? began to

that
think ~~this~~ may be the point where we're losing the ballgame ~~the~~.

*last. If women with their finer
is the bad inning. Sensitivity were as good as
lost.*

JML: Very good. My last question: Great religious ideas have

great followings and they last for millennia—some do fade ~~the~~.

Some.)
defile, but the greatest ~~ones~~ last for millennia. And I'm assuming

there's a reason for that. Your faith in the theological and

intellectual efficacy of your system is very strong, very powerful

I've observed it for many years and it's deep-rooted inside you. 31

you have also said your system is not going to be adopted by many

other people.

NM: Not in a hurry, ~~not in a hurry~~. No. *There's no need at all
for our fears, Only an appeal
for our human pride.*

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JML: If anybody.

NM: If ever.

JML: Does this bother you?

I suppose that if I had
 NM: No. ~~Because years ago I used to be~~ oh, I lived with much

~~ambition for my possibilities. And so it was possible if I had~~

I would
 developed these ideas when I was 30 or 40 I ~~had~~ have wanted to

religious
 become a ~~great world~~ leader. But that's ^{is} not in my capacity. And

~~for me the feeling I have is that if there's any validity to any of~~

thoughts, if they take
 these ideas, if it takes root in any people to a great extent, then, yes,
some of these notions
~~they may yet be adopted by many.~~
~~it may take over. Because I do believe that in organized religion,~~

there are
 there are two elements now on the horizon *that* that can yet destroy the

world as we know it. One of them is technology and the other is

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The second
organized religion. ~~Because I think organized religion is what~~

intelligent Christianity
drives people into stupidity. It can take ~~the brightest people~~ and

and
(deprive them of their ability ~~to think and~~ to look at ~~what their~~

oblique
existence is. They're ~~forever trying~~ to force their thought to fit a

mold that may never have existed. And certainly doesn't exist

now. ~~And that~~ drives people to extremes. ~~I can point to our~~

~~president. He's obviously incapable of subtle thinking. And, so,~~

So, I do feel that my existential sense
~~my feeling is this religion that I have could make for a better~~

or glad as a Being who needs us as
~~universe 50 years from now, 100 years from now. I have no~~
~~much as we need him could yet~~
~~reach man, But I feel no great~~ *une-*
~~immediate inner rage to get this out right away and try to convince~~
directive

I'm content to see these
~~people with it. I don't care to travel around the country trying to~~
interviews published eventually. But
~~sell this as such. When I get into conversations with people I think~~

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~~it up~~ it isn't that I won't bring it up. If we do enough of these

~~interviews and they're good enough, we can print it as a book in the~~

~~see what happens. But my feeling is that it's down the road, not~~

that's for

~~far~~ down the road. I think, *if you wish, we do* want, you could make the next

the thing, a thing

interview ~~we~~ do on *how* do you see this religion functioning in the

future

(society?" That might be interesting. *IT'S* ~~it would be~~ uncharted ground

for you and me

~~for me and you~~ we might have some fun with it

This

JML: That might be a good way to *finish the interview early,* ~~cinch it off~~. I think we've

most of the way

moved through almost every area you wanted to talk about

Yes, we could call the book

NV: That would be the last one—the last lecture. ~~Hubris~~ Why...

"Theological Hubris."

~~don't we call this Teleological Hubris?~~

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JML: I think what you said before—God learns. That ~~is~~

~~encompasses the previous~~
~~encompassing the statement for all the~~ conversations. Everything ~~is~~ *4 say*

say
~~relates back to that. It's the answer at the end of every road of~~
~~questions.~~

NM: God learns.

JML: I like that ~~very much. That's it. I asked them all. [tape ends]~~

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JMI : I want to begin by talking about saints. In most religions they play a tremendous role. They intercede for lesser humans, they give witness to God's greatness, they are models for humanity ^{through} ~~by~~ their ability to withstand suffering. Indeed, some of their suffering is self-imposed. Do you see saints in the same way as the traditional religions? ^{do?}

NM: You reach me on my weak point. I don't know that I have much to say on the subject. It does make sense to me that there would be certain people whom God would feel ^{more} close to. ^{OK, possibly} ~~I suppose~~ the subtext to such a remark is that God ^{does} ~~may~~ not feel equally near to each one of us. ^{in fact} I would doubt that He does. After all the devil is always doing is best to obfuscate the divine venture, to muddy God's vision of us. Most human beings are by now a complex mixture of good and evil. They're devil-infested, they're God-illuminated. Most of us are both and so it's not easy to reach us.

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What characterizes humanity today is that very few of us ever get a message directly from God or the devil. (Of course, many hysterics receive several messages a day.) ~~For~~^E most of us however, ^{exist with} ~~we live in~~ a subtle smudge ^{on} ~~to~~ our senses. We live in a complex and contradictory environment—sensually speaking, theologically speaking, spiritually speaking, we're not as near to ultimates as we may have been a few centuries ago

Now there are people who succeed, one way or another, of divesting themselves of most of the devil. It's hard for me to believe, however, that a saint can exist with nothing of the Satan still residing in him or her. I have to assume that saints are relatively pure (at least after they have ^{scourged} ~~scanned~~ themselves). The notion that they are absolutely pure—well, given my temperament I find that concept near to offensive. It begs too many questions ^{(at first, ~~And then~~ and then it makes theistic} It makes everything too easy). Because if a saint is perfect, why the hell do they fail so often? Does the devil overtake them? Or—let me advance an essentially medieval argument—is the saint so

too easily imposed

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good that the devil has to use extraordinary and exhausting efforts

to defeat ~~his~~ him or her, and so the saint serves God's purpose ~~and~~

by trying the devil,

thereby, the saint is happy too.

JML: But all saints are not defeated.

NM Give me an example of some triumphant ^{ones} ~~saints~~.

JML: Saint Peter.

NM: Saint Peter was a mess! He deserted Christ three times.

JML: But then he redeemed himself and started Christianity

NM: Yes, and Christianity may still be laboring under the fact that

- a three-time betrayer
it was Peter who commenced it. You've got a three-time

treacherous associate there...

JML: There are other saints. . .

NM: I won't say that people can't repent, that they can't restore

their spirit back to something finer, but nonetheless renegades ^{have} ~~are~~

to remain under suspicion.

JML: That, in a way, brings me to my next question. Your god

and your devil are limited, I assume—

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NM: Not limited but finite. Certainly not infinite.

JML: I assume that human perfection is truly impossible for you as you just said. If there were a human being who was all-good, she or he would be better than God. And if we found an absolutely perfect human being, your theology would be hard-pressed to account for that person.

NM: I don't think I'm in any danger of having my theology, such as it is, overthrown by that premise. Of course, there will never be a perfect human being. It's not in the range of our thinking. I'm going so far as to say there's no such thing as a perfect divinity.

The nature of the universe is provisional, existential, certainly not finally determined. That is at the core of everything I present here.

The divine future is as open as our own.

JML: Ergo, there can never be a perfect human being.

NM: We don't need reasoning to justify that conclusion.

JML: I can admit that Saint Peter was not perfect. But think of St. Francis of Assisi. . .

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NM: ~~Did~~ Yes, he's perfect in a beautiful way that took care of a great many animals, and thereby brought us a little more into sympathy with creatures who often feel more life than ourselves but I don't know that he improved human nature particularly—not even by his fine example. I'm asking, rather, about the kind of saints who are trying to change human nature, and almost always end up as martyrs. Indeed, the way they become saints is that they were martyrs first.

JML: The one way we know a saint is a saint, at least in Christianity, is that they were martyred. St. Steven was martyred. St. Sebastian was martyred. . .

But you mentioned animals. To shift for a moment—how far down does the chain of being—or, if you will—the war between god and the devil manifest itself?

NM: I have no idea.

JML: You said that dogs have souls.

NM: Yes.

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JML : Then I assume both sides have enlisted them. What about the other animals? Are you ready to say that some are on God's side? Are the eagles and the doves? The vultures and the snakes?

NM : For me to speak with ~~presumptive~~ authority on these matters is comic. I would rather rely on the sort of instinctive verdicts that humans come up with after centuries of dealing with certain problems. For instance, my belief in ^{the existence of} God and devil comes to a good extent from the fact that the majority of people, through all of recorded time, have believed in both evil spirits and good ones and, finally, in a god and a devil ^{as well as their} ~~with~~ angels and demons. If the majority believe that, one has to pay a certain attention. One can't get so puffed up with our modern egotism that we scorn ^{all} ~~such~~ prevailing ~~ongoing~~ human sentiments.

All right then. By that rule of thumb, I might say dogs tend to be closer to God than cats. Dogs have loyalty, they have affection, they exhibit the need to love, whereas cats strike me often as creatures of the devil. Now, mind you—they were all

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created by God. It's just that the devil may have preempted some
more successfully
of those creations ~~earlier~~ *(than others)*.

JML: Snakes and crocodiles and. . .

NM: It's ~~totally~~ beyond me. I'm an ignorant man concerning ~~and~~
animals. If I knew more about their positive functions, I could talk
about snakes and crocodiles, but I confess to ~~abysmal~~ *my*
incompetence *when it comes to delineating* ~~at declaring what~~ the positive functions of toads,
or what have you
rats, cockroaches, lice, ~~might be~~ *and so on*.

JML: Are there parts of existence in your view that are unclaimed
by either side? I'm thinking of microbes, uninhabited planets, the
bottom of the Pacific Ocean, neutral territory, so to speak, that God
and the devil have not contested. Or is everything polarized?

NM: I'd say it's more a matter of divine investment in part and in
full. In other words, I keep going back to the notion that God is
not all-powerful but the Creator. So in the course of evolving
certain creatures, their future possibilities were directly interesting
to God, were pursued further. Other elements may have been tried

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as interesting possibilities for the future. And so, very often, they live relatively unchanged for millennia, for aeons. When we come to such matters as bacteria, where my knowledge is close to a blank

slate, I would venture the guess that these may have been virtually *they are Mine, but they do* passive experiments by God. Yes, I made it, ~~but it seems not to~~

~~not~~ arouse My first interest! Or, does the devil dip his toe into the water to churn up some particularly evil bacteria? Counter to that,

I have to add that I hardly subscribe to the modern notion that all disease is evil, and is to be eradicated at all cost, so that we can all

live for centuries and populate the globe with ten trillion people,

and set up shuttles to moon cities, Mars, Venus, et al?
Life and death, I will repeat, do have an intimate relation to each *God?*

other. Death *may be* is as great a test and as great an adventure as life.

hard to think Just as we cannot *always* of an existence where there is ~~only~~ daylight and

never night, so I can't comprehend ~~life~~ life without death ~~and~~ ~~for~~

and consequent rebirth for some of us. I do think that
~~rebirth. I think we, all, or most of us, or some of us, go back again.~~

~~do come~~
go in and come out. I will say that I don't have the remotest clue

what we may become in our next existence. It's possible, it's

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perfectly possible, that some or all of us have to descend to the

bacteriological level and return from there. My guess is it's not

that elaborate a chain of reincarnation for that ^{would} propose a

^{vastly more} ~~more~~ complex universe in the after-life, ^{than in our own.} I would rather assume

there's a purpose ^{to} for everything, including the agents that tend to

^{Not a perfect purpose, mind you, but an ongoing one.} infect us and kill us. ^{It may be there are agents of death with}

^{(for their effect on spirit) as} which God experiments as fully as ~~God experiments~~ with the

development of human and animal life. In that sense, life and

death are counterparts of the same ongoing existence.

JML: Yang and yin. Interpenetrating.

NM: OK.

JML: You've talked a lot about the moment of death and the state

of mind one is in at the moment of death—this follows. I think

from what you just said. Peace of mind, I think, is important to

many religions—peace of mind at death, none more so than

Catholicism. Which actually has a sacrament called Extreme

Unction ^(JML, CK w/ IM) now called "Sacrament of the Sick" or

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~~some such~~ which was created by the Church to give to people at the moment of death.

NM: How did the Church arrive at this confidence in its power?

JML: Well, over millennia, the Church created seven sacraments. And the last one is Extreme Unction. I can't tell you which Father of the Church came up with the theology of it, but there is a sense of the Church reaching out to the individual at the moment of death and applying all of its powers to giving that person peace of mind as they passed over.

NM: Or, at least, giving them a belief in peace of mind.

JML: From the Church's point of view, Extreme Unction works - and I've seen people receive it—and you know, it does give them tremendous peace of mind.

NM: I can believe it's effective, ^{for many,} (Certainly for devout Catholics, it would be. Let me tell you a small story about a dear friend of mine, Eddie Bonetti, who was dying of cancer. ~~And~~ I spoke to him

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a day before he went. He was a marvelous fellow and you can see from the conversation what ~~his positive qualities were~~ *I thought about him*

We were talking on the phone and he knew death was ~~close~~ *very close*

At a given moment, I said to him, "Eddie, are you scared?" He said, "Yeah, Norman, I am."

I said, "Eddie, it seems to me you have less reason to be afraid than anyone I know. Because you're the loyalest guy I've ever met. You never turned your back on a friend, no matter how much it cost you. I really can't believe that something bad is waiting for you."

He said, "You really believe that, Norman?"

I said, "I think so, I really do." *It was true. Some of his friends were pretty sorry guys, but he never*
~~And~~ *cheered* *deserted* *them*
 the woman he was living with at the time told me he did die later that day with a smile. Which pleased me, immensely

because I loved the guy and if I was any use to him then, well, I attempted, naturally, to hope that my words had a little to do with his peace.

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So, yes, I can believe that Extreme Unction ^{might all - good then} ~~can be~~ ^{understand} ~~wonder~~ for some. I will say ^{yes} I think it's a human creation rather than a divine fact. There were no miracles announcing it, no revelation from God. This was a human attempt, if you will, to understand how God's mind works. Now it was brought into being as a sacrament, which is to say it had powerful backing, huge culture much tradition, many decisions, synods debating over it, coming up with their sacraments one by one, developing them, using them, keeping the ones that worked best.

So, all right, yes, I can believe Extreme Unction is there for a devout Catholic. It might not work for someone like myself. If someone came in and said, "You're going to die in peace." I'd probably say, "Let me go. If you don't mind, I'll fine-tune my own end—you don't need to do it for me."

Certain theologians would say, "Well, this is vanity. This is precisely why you're not going to have a good end." And my feeling is, "Hey, pal, it's open. None of us know. It doesn't matter

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how much tradition is behind it. Tradition suggests there may well
be something powerful behind it, but can hardly ^{assent/affirm} it. Certainly no
for every human case."

JML: Why is the state of mind at death so very important to you?

NM: Because I think it's our point of departure.

JML: ~~So what? Everybody has a bad day. You could happen to~~
have a bad day on the day you die.

NM: No, no—whenever you have a bad day, there's a lot of reason
for the bad day. I can give you 20 causes for an ugly hour. Some
are serious, some are passing. But, no, I won't let you hide behind
the notion of a bad day.

JML: But there are also days when we have false euphoria. We
can feel good for no accountable reason and then the next day say,
"Why did I feel so good? I still have all these problems!"

NM: Whenever we have an emotion we can't account for—good or
bad, I expect that the root is karmic. That may be the only
visitation we receive from previous lives. By the laws of the game,

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which may well be basic and necessary, we can't know who we were and where we were in previous lives. Nonetheless, intense and unaccountable emotions can come from one's karmic past.

But I'm not answering your question. I think at the moment we die, we are the sum of all the good and bad we've done, all the courage and cowardice we've exercised. And so, for example, if we die with a desire to be reborn, I think it means a great deal to God. If you will, it's almost like we reach into a litter to select a pup, and the one who catches our eye, we choose to take home. Using that crude analogy, I think if we die—Eliot's wonderful line, "not with a bang but a whimper"—which parenthetically obsessed Eliot Eliot's writing is so often based on how we meet our death. If you approach his poetry with that in mind, *The Wasteland* becomes a study of people who don't have a clue how to perish. And yet it is so important to be ready. After all, that is the one situation we can't simulate, can't preempt. We can pretend to a huge number of emotions in our lives, we may well spend three-quarters of our

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lives acting, being what we are not. I would go so far as to say that one of the reasons people get married is so they can be themselves just a bit. They don't have to present a face to the world. People who live alone are always so obliged once they leave their room. They have to depend so much upon the opinion of others

So, I would say that at the moment when one is close to death, that is, if one knows one's going to die, there can be a ^{desire} ~~desire~~ for another life, or a yearning toward peace or—and this is the worst condition—a wish to pass away in stupor. The largest urge of the soul becomes, "I don't want to feel pain, let me feel nothing. I will accept nothingness." These are all choices, I would say.

And really, suppose you're on high, looking people over, wondering which ones you'll refashion. Suppose there's a particular human being God is most interested in, but at the last moment that person is pleading for stupor. God says, "Do I really want to go through this again? This person is, finally, a great disappointment."

You see, I believe our final judgment in this life is given in the form of our rebirth. I believe we've spoken of this before. The only divine judgment we receive is our placement in the next life. Often ^{the} decision may be, "No. No need ^{for that one} to be reborn. Off the board." True death. End of existence. So if you have no desire to live again, that could be determinative.

JML: I want to explore this more. A nurse told me this recently. A nurse who was a hospice nurse, who cared for the dying, three times a week she went through this, and she had great experience—told me that the end, often, because people were taking drugs, they'd be on morphine to cut the pain, and their personality, as she put it, "dissolves." That they were alive, they were functioning, but their soul was already gone. And so for them, the death was before they died—the body was still breathing, the automatic systems were working but—but indeed, the people I have seen die, they revert to powerful impulses, powerful atavistic impulses. The desire to keep oneself clean—they get on the toilet

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when they're dying. The desire to remember one's mother or grandmother. Or when someone touches you, the desire to reach out—afraid you're going to be violated when you're lying on your bed. And I've seen that, the few deaths I've seen.

So people don't ordinarily die in moments of clarity like Eddie Bonetti, presumably thinking happy thoughts, ready to die and ready to choose a new life. A lot of time when they die, they don't know who they are.

NM: I can't answer that. The real question is when do you die spiritually? You can pass away spiritually an hour, a day, a month or five years before your death. That may be when the question of rebirth is considered and decided. I think as a harsh, practical matter, the closer your soul can remain intact up to the extinction of your body, the finer candidate you are for reincarnation. That's just my notion.

JML: So risky. . . You mean someone who really wants to be reborn but goes into a coma loses their shot?

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NM: Look, the soul can fight the body right down to the very end. The soul can say, "all right, I don't feel anything in my legs any more. Nothing in my fingers. I can't find my thoughts, but I know what I want. That way is more life. I want to be reborn." Or, to the contrary, the soul can feel it isn't worth it. "Let the body have its day. I've abused this body all my life, it's now demanding a cruel payment and I'm bankrupt. . ."

But I do think that the soul—taking this intelligence from your lady at the hospice—if the soul leaves a week or two before the body, I think, speaking in terms of the transmigration of souls, it could make for a complex travel schedule. You know, I have this feeling—so many talk about death as a vision: There's this wonderful white light, and relatives come out to meet you. I'm a touch dubious about that. For some people, yes. They were close to their relatives and their relatives do come out.

But there's an awful lot of spirit travel involved. The logistics of the hereafter interest me because God's energies, as I

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see it, are immense but, to repeat, not infinite. So there are all sorts of procedures to be followed after you die. Economic procedures if you will, involving the energies available to the ~~hereafter~~ ^{afterward} ~~hereafter~~. It may be much more complex and less adaptable than we assume. The more flaming religions, the ones that promise everything in the ~~hereafter~~, bring out my cynicism (which I consider my shield against wishful thinking). Often, I expect, in the immediate hours or days after our death there can be long waits. You may hang around in a vast hall—somewhat like the first day in the Army, when nobody knew what to do with you and you were waiting to get assigned to some sort of temporary training platoon. We can talk about limbo a little later on if you wish. Limbo may be an absolutely realistic station for most people when they die. That's they hang around for quite a while.

JMI.: Limbo can be for years.

NM: Well, I don't know. In the Catholic religion, there could be an eternity to limbo, but I think it could also be a matter of divine

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bureaucratic—dare I say it?—mismanagement. Because

bureaucratic mismanagement on earth—I don't ~~we~~ know ^{that} we

~~necessarily~~ ^{these wasteful civilities are gone} have to assume all ~~that changes~~ in the hereafter. I don't

think angels are perfect any more than I believe demons are totally

evil. I think the rarest condition in existence is absolute purity ~~of~~—

~~any variety living or cut by glaciers into stone.~~

If God is a Creator, then God cannot be absolutely pure

because creation consists in part of improving upon one's errors

and offering less purchase to one's vices.

JML: What about people—we've all heard about people who die

after living lives of greed and misery, they're rotten people.

detestable in every way, but at the last minute, the last few weeks,

they call in the priest, they get a seraphic smile on their face, they

have money, perhaps, they're surrounded by servants, and they go

off into the hereafter feeling very good about themselves

Deluded, perhaps, about their ultimate worth, but nonetheless.

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smiling, saying their prayers. They haven't gone to a church or done anything decent—

NM: Well, you're creating an imaginary person.

JML: There are people like that who die happy after living a miserable life.

NM: Who says they died happy? They could be acting right until the end.

JML: That's the moment you said you don't act.

NM: No. No. I said people who are serious about their death don't act. They may be acting for others, but not before eternity

I'll give you an explanation why a truly rotten person can die happy, which is they were so rotten in their previous existence, the life before this one, that this life, bad as it was, proved to be a spiritual improvement over the previous one. They die happy because they feel, everything considered, considering how bad were their beginnings, and how absolutely loathesome the initial impulses they were born with, ^{that} they have gotten better under the

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circumstances. We all know people who were total pricks ^{for most of} ~~their~~ ^{back} ~~entire~~ lives who mellow a little ~~bit~~ at the end. That's another ~~human quality.~~

JML: But you said all the good and evil in one's life is summed up in death. I'm thinking of those who are miserable people for the first 95% of their lives and then they're sweet old people at the end—doesn't seem very just that they should have a happy death. You'd think somehow they should have a miserable death. Where's the fairness in things?

NM: I think you're speaking too hypothetically. Speculations of the sort I go in for make me most uneasy when others indulge themselves. I mean, this person you're talking about—as a novelist I find him impossible to conceive in my head. People who are rotten all their lives rarely end up sweet at the end. If they do—there is such a thing as truly evil and ugly impulses wearing out and burning out. Just as good people sour, ugly people can die in a more benign state. They've used up the ugliness in themselves

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They've been ~~rotten to people~~, horrible to people, and maybe they feel a bit of contrition at the end. Your religion is based on that.

JML: Absolutely.

NM: Between the stirrup and the ground. I've always found it excessively sentimental and too easy: be evil all your life and as you're falling from the horse, before your head is knocked off your body—

JML: Say a perfect Act of Contrition!

NM: Yes! I've always found that extreme. And a little convenient. The Catholic Church is not only a study in immensities, human wisdom, but *a compendium of* what applied skill it has at maneuvering *your* thoughts around the tightest corners.

JML: It's thought of almost everything. It has an answer for almost everything, every issue.

You spoke a little bit about limbo but I don't recall that you said much about purgatory—as an idea, as a place, as a metaphor.

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Of course, it's a wonderful metaphor, we all use it. What is your idea of purgatory as a metaphor?

NM: Well, as a metaphor—tell me, purgatory is a temporary station?

JML: It may last for a millennia, but it's temporary.

NM: I confess I don't begin to know these concepts as well as I should. Does limbo have any relation to purgatory?

JML: No. Limbo is the place for those people on whom God can't make a judgment. They died before they were baptized or ~~something like that.~~

NM: Absolutely meaningless and silly. When you get into that .

JML: I agree. The Church doesn't even talk about limbo any more. They've almost dropped it as a concept. But purgatory .

NM: Now purgatory. . . yes.

JML: Purgatory is not endless. There is an end to your suffering. The amount of time you're there and what kind of suffering you

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have, according to the Catholic Church, would depend on what your crimes were.

NM: I see purgatory in altogether different terms. The notion that if you suffer long enough you'll purge yourself—I don't see any reason to have that in the hereafter. I would suggest instead that being reborn takes care of purgatory. For some people, life is, indeed, purgatory. For a few people, life is heaven— they're happy 90% of the time. For some people, life is hell. I don't think we need these other structures. I think we pay our debts through our reincarnations. That makes much more sense to me than these immensely wasteful places called heaven and hell where nobody does anything, where nothing's brought back into the divine economy, people are just marking time.

I see God, if you will, as being Faustian, aiming to go further. God is not satisfied with His or Her creation, God wants it all to become better. Therefore, wasteful procedure is anathema to God. So, I do see heaven, purgatory and hell, therefore, as wasteful

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procedures. Who can speak interestingly of heaven, after all
Shaw made the best single attempt and decided heaven was not it.

And there is always the uneasy little feeling that people have that
it could be like Club Med, ^{or} a gated ~~club~~ community in Florida

~~That's divine heaven, a gated community~~ Whereas on earth, we ~~do~~
^{Make it is only} know heaven, we experience heaven. We may experience it

^{for} three, or four times in a long life, maybe for a minute, no more, but

we know what heaven is. There's a kind of luminousness to the joy.

Most of us, unfortunately, come closest to heaven through drugs

But, all right—we know what it is.

We know what hell is. Hell can be as simple as having a bad
case of gout. Or a screamer of a drug trip.

JML: There's conscience. . .

NM: Purgatory, for me, is a sense of temporary but immense
living conflict between one's temptations and one's responsibility.

When we feel dread, we're not that far from purgatory. We feel
something very important could be taking place in our soul but we

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don't know what, and we're full of fear of taking the step we don't believe is demanded of us. Most men meet purgatory in terms of their personal courage. If they're afraid—if they're afraid of playing football, putting on the pads and going out to play can be purgatory. Boxing can be purgatory. Skiing, if the trail is steep and narrow, and the mogals are formidable, can certainly reduce you. Bungee-jumping can be purgatory—brief but intense. Men—now women—are beginning to search for that purgatory as well. It used to be that women's purgatory was related to the terrors of childbirth. After all, in the Middle Ages, there was one chance in ten a woman would die in childbirth. That was a true terror. One had to face ultimates to have a child.

JML: How limbo and purgatory came about, if I'm remembering correctly, ~~in the thinking of Christianity was they began with~~ notions of heaven and hell borrowed from other religions ~~because there were previous religions that had both~~. Then the structure of the church became more complex and people asked questions.

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What if you've been bad but not so bad you should be condemned to eternal hellfire—you've only been sort of bad—and the Church said, "you're right, we have a place for those people where they have modest suffering." Then people said, "what about people outside the Church? We've been told they're condemned but what if they haven't done anything evil? They died at 3 years old—a wonderful little child but never baptized. . ." The Church said "we have a place for them too." So the Church was trying to create— I'm sure they would have created another place if they'd had to.

But ultimately, the Church began to see the folly of limbo—what a ridiculous idea for people to live in a big empty space forever and no positive pain but no positive joy ^{even if the Baltimore} [for JML from JM: "perfect -

^{did say "perfect"} ~~Catechism said~~ "perfect natural happiness" said the Baltimore Catechism. ^{highly endurable,} No beautiful vision but otherwise ~~OK~~

We talked about saints but I never got to my question about demons. I remember you told me some time ago you had an encounter with a demon. Or a succubus or—whatever you want to

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call it, right here in a room you rented for a week one winter or

Commercial Street in Provincetown. Would it be worthwhile to

say anything about that experience?

NM: I ~~won't get into it~~ ^{Don't know,} Mike, because it takes too long to tell and there's no real point. I can ~~certainly~~ speak of succubi and incubi in

the abstract sense. I think they would be instruments of the devil

and most useful. I only felt such a presence once in my life and it

seemed to come out of nowhere, which is why I don't rush to talk

about it because I don't understand why it was there. But I really ^{did}

~~feel~~ ^{Real through part of a night as} as if there were some intangible creature fastened to my chest.

~~I do have a story that may be worth telling~~ ^{later} about a poetess named

Mina Loy. Something like seventy or seventy-five years ago she

was in a small hotel ^{on} in the Left Bank in Paris and one night in her

room, she felt this hideous oppression, this monstrous, intangible

creature, ^{which} yet seemed nonetheless, most alive and ^{hideously} fastened to her

chest. She lived in horror through the night and felt ^{was wholly} abominable

wretched in the morning; she went downstairs to drink some coffee

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on the terrace of this little hotel she was staying at, just across the street from the Seine. Alastair Crowley, the famous and notorious magician, was there, a table or two away, and was talking about a man he detested who was also staying at the hotel. And Crowley said, "You know, last night I sent an incubus to invade him, yet I saw ^{him} this morning ^{and} ~~that~~ he looked perfectly all right. I don't understand it." Mina Loy's comment was, "Let no one say Alastair Crowley has no powers. It's just that they're misdirected."

The story is amusing but it also ^{uses up my} ~~establishes my~~ capacity to talk intelligently about incubi and succubi. I would just assume they're tools of the devils and used rarely. It's possible God ^{might} employ them also to scare the very life out of certain people whom God feels can use some shaking-up.

If you're sailing through seas you hardly comprehend, you tend to hold to the few things you know about sailing. So here, I'm ready to drop my sails. These are confusing and uncharted waters for me.

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Priests had to pray for you, amulets were sewn onto your burial garments, you also needed ^{daily} prayers said by your relatives. You needed a tomb that would protect you from evil spirits when you needed rest—you would go out ^{to} and explore the underworld, and then you'd come back to your tomb ^{where} and your spirit entered again into your embalmed mummy which rested, of course, in your highly decorated casket. After some rest, you'd ^{travel} go out into the underworld again. Finally, you made it through the underworld ^{Past lakes of fire and horrible monsters. Sometimes!} Sometimes you didn't. Rich Egyptians used to have a prayer: "Oh, Amon, do not let me die a second time in the Land of the Dead."

The Egyptians believed that the second death was final. The first was provisional ^{if} you were able to pass through the underworld into the Elysian fields, you could live forever. So, for them, wealth was crucial. A poor man without the protection of priests, amulets and a tomb had no chance at all. Which is why you have that phenomenon of an early civilization, where most people live at a subsistence level, but there is fabulous wealth at the top.

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I think that belief carries over. People who are abstemious might look with horror on rich people who ^{dinner} ~~have~~ ^{eat} gold plates ^{the} ~~and~~ ^{their china} the serving dishes for dinner. But ^{some of} the rich obviously believe that the afterworld is structured to ^{give certain} ~~enable~~ people who are rich to have ^{like themselves} more of a purchase on eternity. Not all rich people. Some rich people feel guilty. Late in life, they pursue philanthropy - they're terrified of the hereafter. They know what they did to get that wealth and they are in terror.

Then the poor—some of whom are just bitter and furious—feel they were absolutely denied any kind of chance at any existence at all. They are very angry at God. You also have the poor who believe that it's all right. I've lived a clean life, a good life. I've raised my children, done my best, I've never despaired and I'm going to go to a good place.

⁷³⁹ ~~We have these separate outlooks, and~~ we have an ongoing question for those who believe in a ^{human continuation} ~~continuance~~ after death. At a guess—my guess—I would think there's an ongoing negotiation

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between God and the devil over who travels where. I'm assuming that not only is God not all-powerful but the devil is not all-conquering either. The two systems are in deep contest with one another. The devil, therefore, would not wish to be excluded completely from the possibility of rebirth. The devil might desire to have some of his rich people taken care of. Of course, there are rich people who are close to saintly, who manage to live with their wealth in such a way that it hasn't corrupted them. I think that's rare—but it does occur, we've all known a few. They are lovely people sometimes. Not all rich people are awful, but a great many rich people are certainly in no shape to look at the eye of the needle. Nonetheless, you can find a lively energy in some of the rich. Some of them made their money, after all, through their ^{own} huge energy. Not all people who gain power arrive just through foul means.

So, the hereafter is a complex matter as seen by and for the rich. I expect God to be perfectly willing to discriminate. Certain

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of the rich. yes, absolutely, let's send them out to be born again

They're interesting.

JML: Are you saying that God will endow some to be born again into great wealth? Or into poverty?

NM: Yes. Why not? It's a species of testing. People who were born in rich and favorable circumstances in one life and grew spoiled and had lives that were disappointing might be reborn as poor people. Others who were poor never got it through their heads that they were deprived. They have a touch of aristocracy innate in them. And there are rich people who have the modesty of poor people. I think you find that all the time—these are not only spiritual tests but can be your spiritual hereafter. One function of reincarnation is to give God further insights into the people He or She is dealing with. I go back to the fundamental premise: God does not understand us completely any more than we understand our children. We can know them quite well in terms of their habits and attitudes, but we certainly don't understand them in all ways

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So God wants to know more about His Creation, and the devil, many times, is attempting precisely to muck up such clarity.

JML: I don't have any disputes on the individual level, but when I think of that phrase of Adam Smith's, "the wealth of nations," there are some peoples, some nations, who have lived in terrible, terrible misery. Take one nation I know a little about, the Irish. For 500, 600 years they lived under British wealth and power and now it seems almost just that the Irish are richer than the English.

NM: Are they? I didn't know that.

JML: Yes. They have surpassed them. In per capita income now, the Irish passed the British—they're the wealthiest nation in the European Union.

NM: I'll give you another example. For a thousand years and more, the Jews lived in the ghetto. They weren't allowed to hunt or fish or farm in most parts, they were allowed to be money-lenders or inn-keepers or own shops in their own communities. So what did they do? They gave everything they had to their ^{religious} schools.

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would say that the results got into the gene stream —those ghetto
Jews put their emphasis on learning and ^{Quay}intelligence because they
own books, particularly the Talmud, ^{were}~~was~~ still open to them

JML: If you look at all the plusses and minuses of all the
nations—great wealth in some and great poverty in others—how
does that mesh in with the individual decisions God and the devil
express with reincarnation? It seems God may have to give up a
whole country or a whole nation or whole race of people for long
periods.

NM: I don't want to get carried away with understanding God's
motives. I'm looking to find a few general principles.

JML: You're looking at individuals. I'm asking you to look at it
from a national point of view.

NM: That means first, you have to believe in races. I do, to a
certain extent. It's completely incorrect these days to talk about
such matters, but I think no, the very mixture of climate and
language through many centuries does produce one kind of person

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as opposed to another. That may now be part of God's interest in us as individuals. "Will this particular man or woman turn out better or worse than I think he or she will?" God's also interested in races—how will they turn out?

JML: In nations.

NM: Yes. And also in nations—which, obviously are not races. Far more complicated.

JML: God must be thinking a lot about China, with one billion people. . .

NM: God must be wondering if China is going to take over the world. God learns from that. I keep coming back to my fundamental mnemonic—God learns. This is why I'm so opposed to those religions which assume that God knows everything, so get down on your knees as fast as you can.

JML: Last time we spoke, ~~you got into~~ ^{of} evolution. ~~At one point~~ ^{it} you said that God was learning about ~~evolution~~ as He went along.

NM: Yes. God learns.

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JML: Then in those early periods of time, with slime covering the oceans when land had just been created, you indicated that God was in the slime of early creation, yes, in there evolving with everything else. Yet you also said with great assurance that God is the creator of the world and the solar system. I was having trouble reconciling God in the slime and God as the creator—

NM: I lean to the notion ^{that} God is the Creator—or, what's the word I'm looking for—the factotum of the solar system. The notion that God is something we can conceive in unified form is—I don't necessarily adhere to that. Suppose God is the lord of the solar system but at the same time, had to learn how to develop the system from the slime on up. Most people, myself included, have no great trouble believing Jesus was the son of God—but God was many things and looked to become more and He searched and He learned. God learned.

JML: Yes, but when did God put the souls into creation?

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NM: Why would I know? Our understanding has to become a net at this point. How much of God is in every house fly? Something, perhaps. Something.

JML: The soul is special. . .

NM: You have to conceive of God as being . . . How to put it? Immensely differentiated. So that the life we see in a fly, those wonderful moves, yes, that came from the Creator. He gave that to the fly. Did He give the fly a conscience? Did He give the fly a sense of proportion? Probably not. The key to the notion is that it's all been a huge experiment, an ongoing, developing experiment with countless results, good and bad, but most of them were good enough so that evolution continued despite its failures. God learns, God learns. And so God invests Himself or Herself in all sorts of creatures en route. Not only animals but flora as well.

JML: So the creation of the soul was not an historic event?

NM: Who knows? It could have been a moment in time. The Bible seems to think so. Now, I do believe in the existence of the

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soul but I don't subscribe to the iron authenticity of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Both were written by committee. The Old Testament was put together over a long period by a series of very talented committees, much more talented than the latter-day Bible-builders who composed the New Testament. On the other hand, the people who wrote the New Testament were also ~~fine scholars and they were~~ familiar with the best remarks that had been made up to that point in the Old Testament and by many a sage, prophet, and mystic, and they used them. They were also attached to a concept that may or may not be true. Which is that Jesus was the son of God. They were serious about that, but they were still a committee. So, as literary works the Old Testament has some faults, and the New Testament a good many. To accept them, therefore, as the absolute map of our spiritual universe is comparable to using the kind of charts Christopher Columbus had before him when he set out for the

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West. ~~So our~~ ^{whether even our} idea of the ~~B~~ Beginning as presented in the first three sentences of Genesis is a false concept.

In fact, I studied Classical Hebrew at one time and the first sentence of Genesis—have we discussed that?

JML: No.

NM: Well, as you know: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Or so it goes in English. Actually, the first word of the Old Testament—in Hebrew—is ~~most~~ singular. The only place it exists in all of the language is in that first word of the Old Testament, "barashith," and the second ^{word} is "bora." There are many interpretations of "barashith" but I came up with "out of the pits. . ." or "out of the depths. . ." "Bora" is "being" or "creating." So the first two words say, "being becoming," or "being coming out of the pits." The next words are not "the heavens and the earth," but "the firmament above" and "the firmament below," ^{as to} declare that there are two species of existence ^{higher, (good and bad)} from the

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commencement. And then the next sentence? "The breath of God moved upon the waters. . ."

JML: "The breath of God ^{was} upon the waters. . ."

NM: It's not ^{quite} "breath of God", at all. The word used here for breath is "ruach." In Classical Hebrew there are three varieties of breath to signify God's presence. There's "ruach," "nefesh," and

"neshamah." "Neshamah," if I recall correctly, is the gentle breath.

And "nefesh" is a normal wind. "Ruach" is the fierce breath, the angry breath, God's rage. So the line really says, "and the rage ~~of~~ God roared over the waters." So to go back, the first two sentences can ^{well}

be translated as ~~sentence could well be translated~~. "Being,

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~~becoming~~, out of the pits, God created the firmament above and the firmament below. And God's fierce breath roared over the waters."

JML: Much different.

NM: Altogether different. I'm suspicious of committees. I always ^{cook up sedatives} assume they are looking to ~~make pastel candies~~ for people from the world go.

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JML: We've spoken a bit about technology. I'd like to go back to a basic level. Most of humanity sees it as a way to free us from drudgery, and give us leisure time to read and think and travel and sports. Why shouldn't it be seen on balance—on balance—as a good thing? I understand all the bad things about it—but why shouldn't technology be seen as largely salutary? Is technology inherently evil or is it just misused? Misused by the devil or misused by God? Is it inherently evil or is it something God lost control of? Or the devil appropriated?

NM: I think God lost control of it. I have four words to describe technology which I've used several times now: more power, less pleasure. I think there's no getting around it: we can't pretend more pleasure comes to us from technology. It tends to crimp our senses and reduce us to people who ^{are able to} ~~can~~ live in a closed environment. My notion—it's a sentimental notion, doubtless, is that God would have preferred us to be able to do the things we can do through technology by means of our spirit. In other words,

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instead of having television, we could reach into our dreamlife and enjoy organized and marvelous dramas that we could create for ourselves or send by telepathy to our friends. The ultimate aim was for every human being to be immensely creative. ^{su per = entity} And psychic ^{to} ~~so that we would~~ not have needed electronic communications. If I ^{have been} wanted to talk to you, I would be able to have my mind reach yours. We ~~all~~ have small intimations of that. It seems to me such mental powers become more reduced with every advance in technology.

As a specific example, I now use hearing aids and I can't hear without them, most of the time, not with most people. But my remaining ability to hear gets more and more reduced by using my hearing aids. So I think technology tends to curtail our ^{sensuous} possibilities and accelerate our dependencies ^{on technology,}

After all, the great strides that have been made in technology ^{physics} ~~science~~ ^{have a great even conclusive debt to} ~~and engineering~~ ^{came from} previous generations. Maxwell discovered some of the differences between electricity and magnetism. ^{And Is P?} Faraday ^{one of the best} some

Faraday - I think this is it
C.K.

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of the great scientists of the 19th century took imaginative, metaphorical leaps to produce the beginnings of technology. Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill didn't have to study previous speeches to come up with the Gettysburg Address or "I have nothing to offer you but blood, sweat, toil, and tears---". They came out of a past that depended on independent human beings rising up to marvelous solutions at incredible moments. They were not dependent on curious machines they did not really understand.

As a small example, I don't know anyone with a computer who doesn't talk about the glitches.

JML: Look, the first person to use a wheel after the drudgery of dragging things—they must have felt great pleasure. I don't see -

NM: Wait a moment, there are crucial turning points in the advent of modern technology. The center of all that now is electronics. Whereas the first wheel was made of wood, and sharp stones were used to shape it. These were things people could comprehend, they

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came out of the earth. Then people began to learn how to smelt ore. Dangerous business, tricky, but they found the means to get fire to melt the ore and so could separate the slag from the molten metal. The Iron Age began.

I say there's a profound difference between early and later technology. Early technology, lasting through to the 19th century, consisted of dealing with very powerful and explosive elements in

nature and mastering them, so there was awe and excitement to it.

Huge excitement for the railroad when it was developed - people loved to travel on them. They might be cramped and ~~could~~ ^{often} smell bad, but they were exciting. Now, traveling on airplanes is

disagreeable. Everyone thought it'd be immensely exciting but it

isn't. It's reductive. You don't feel like a voyager so much as a

piece of packaged goods. Electronics is the great divide - the watershed between what I would call good technology and bad.

Because no one knows what electronics is. I defy a physicist to reach my mind with an explanation I can comprehend. For that

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matter, we don't even know what electricity is. A current of electrons, yes, but do we know anything about the real inner makeup of an electron? Does it possess ~~its own~~ ^{any} consciousness or not?

JML: So that's the pivot point, then? That's when technology becomes a miserable activity? But when you were a boy, the radio—you must remember the radio—the crystal set and all that

NM: You had to do solder, make wire connections, yes. Even then, you had to buy your vacuum tubes. People assemble computers today out of factory parts. I did model airplanes when they were made of balsa with glue. Then plastic came along. In my childhood, plastic was not common. Bakelite was the nearest you got to it. Now plastic is omnipresent. And it's inert. It doesn't bring on any sense of the uncanny. It offers an inkling of non-existence. I'm just paranoid enough to believe it's the devil who loves plastic because it's going to deaden God's sensibilities before it's all over. God won't be able to get to us through shields of plastic.

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About the time, oh, thirty years ago when women began to wear plastic clothing—the stuff stank, you remember, the awful smell of plastic clothes? I began to think that may be the point where the ballgame was lost. If women with their finer sensibilities were adopting plastic.

JML: Very good. My last question: Great religious ideas have great followings and they last for millennia—some do fade, some die, but the greatest last for millennia. And I'm assuming there's a reason for that. Your faith in the theological and intellectual efficacy of your system is very strong, very powerful. I've observed it for many years and it's deep-rooted inside you. But you have also said your system is not going to be adopted by many other people.

NM: Not in a hurry. No. There's no immediate solace for our

fears. Only an appeal to our human pride, *that we can live with profound uncertainties*

JML: Does this bother you?

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NM: No. I suppose that if I had developed these ideas when I was 30 or 40, I ~~would have wanted to become a religious leader~~ ^{might have dreamed of becoming} 31 that is not in my capacity. If there's any validity to any of these thoughts, if they take root in people to some extent, then, yes, some of these notions may yet be adopted by many. Because I do believe that there are two elements now on the horizon that can yet destroy the world as we know it. One of them is technology and the other is organized religion. The second drives people into stupidity. It can take intelligent children and deprive them of their ability to look at existence. They're obliged to force their thought to fit a mold that may never have existed. And certainly doesn't exist now. That drives people to extremes. So I do feel that my existential sense of God as a Being who needs us as much as we need Him could yet reach many. But I feel no inner directive to get this out right away to convince people. I'm content to see these interviews published eventually. But that's ~~far~~ down the road. I wish, we could do the next interview on the theme, "How do

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you see this religion functioning in a future society?" That might be interesting. It's uncharted ground for you and me-- we might have fun with it.

JML: This might be a good way to finish the interview. I think we've moved through most of the areas you wanted to talk about.

NM: Yes. We could call the book "Theological Hubris."

JML: I think what you said before—God learns. That encompasses the previous conversations. Everything you say relates back to that.

NM: God learns.

JML: I like that.